Sleepover

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by EarthsickWithoutYou

Summary

Set in Season 1, after "Fromage." Will is still confused about his kiss with Alana and seeks romantic advice on how to date and be more "smooth" from Hannibal. Little does he know that Hannibal is madly, passionately obsessed with him, and desperately jealous. Needless to say, Dr. Lecter is all too happy to teach Will everything he knows about love and dating.

Hooked on all these feelings

Therapy sessions with Special Agent Will Graham were getting to be a Herculean challenge to Dr. Hannibal Lecter's previously immaculate self control. He found himself distracted, even strangely nervous, constantly checking his watch and his own reflection in the mirror prior to his friend's arrival, and then every time he saw the adorably bedraggled young man in his waiting room, he seemed to find himself smiling like a lovesick hyena, holding onto the office door for dear life, saying warmly, "Please, come in."

Will didn't seem to notice that there was anything outside of friendship and counsel in Hannibal's attitude, despite the therapist's subtle gestures to test the waters further...glasses of wine during session, lingering a little too long in Will's personal space (Will seldom backed away, and nor did he resist the occasional incidental touch when Hannibal saw fit to bestow one). And Hannibal knew that while seducing Will would be a pleasant pastime to fill a few otherwise dull evenings with temporary recreation, he needed to remember that the long game between them required him to restrain his *feelings,* annoying human feelings that threatened to surge out of control each time they met.

He was genuinely worried that one of these days, he was going to slip up and forget to be himself, becoming instead an infatuated fool at the beckon call of Will Graham. Lest he neglect his psychiatric duties and ongoing secret plans to manipulate this remarkable young man's brilliant mind, warping it into full insanity for his own amusement and protection, he must drag his focus back to the matters at hand.

Doing so meant he must quell the swooning harpsichord composition currently forming itself in his thoughts, based entirely on the distracting effect of eyes which could turn from ocean blue to sage green with the right shift of light.

Hannibal imagined it would be a delight to sketch Will's face, to render in pencil and charcoal those long, dark lashes that seemed to tease him with lingering flutters. Will would blush, in his newly surfacing fantasy, if Hannibal asked to draw him nude, but if he obliged...Hannibal nearly blushed himself, picturing Will just as he was -- flustered, shy, blushing, but entirely naked, lounging in the same leather patient's chair across from him as the doctor drew his likeness. How long would it be, as Hannibal looked carefully from his drawing to Will's overwhelmed, curious expression, before they were both hard? How long before they acted upon their frenzy of shared lust --

Ah, but it isn't shared, so far as you know. Will is touch deprived and lonely, and of course he enjoys your company (as most anyone would). That does not mean he reciprocates your passion, which you shouldn't be indulging in the first place. Mind back on business.

Prior to meeting Will Graham, Hannibal hadn't been in the habit of scolding himself. It was another frustrating necessity.

At the moment, Will was talking about his stressful experiences of late with the FBI, of how Jack Crawford demanded so much of his overworked, terrified mind, how the other agents

either shunned or pitied him, how he longed to escape it all but could not morally allow himself the relief.

Hannibal crossed and uncrossed his legs and dragged his tongue subtly across his lower lip.

Will...Will...my dear boy. The things I would do to you, to make you happy, to make you cry until you came, only after hours of me denying you release. Will's bright eyes, his rare, beautiful smile, that perfect jawline under the scruff. His body, slender but divinely supple, lovely smooth skin just waiting to be clutched, bitten, fucked to the edge of endurance. Those lips...ripe and luscious, simply made for him to devour...

How he could drive Will to an entirely new sort of distraction, if only he had the chance...he would push Will so far into pain and pleasure and desperation that he would forget every other word except for Hannibal's name, or perhaps 'Daddy.' Will's worries and self-doubts would disappear, replaced by a much-loved boy basking in the glow of unending worship.

Hannibal had somehow allowed himself to become distracted once again, but he congratulated himself on a quick recovery, rearranging his momentarily lustful expression with a serious and thoughtful one. He blinked slowly, nodding in understanding as Will continued explaining his woes.

Will had requested an extra session this week, arriving in late morning rather than his usual 7:30pm. It made a difference in his attitude: Will arrived in a frustrated tizzy, still undoing his ill-matching tie from his rumpled plaid shirt as he walked into the office, still changing modes from disgruntled professor to soul-searching psychiatric client. Amazing, the way his fluffy bangs bounced as he yanked off the tie as if it had been strangling him, instead of merely insulting every notion of fashion which had ever existed. Adorable, how his lips puffed in a petulant pout of indignation during the whole process. Hannibal often wondered how anyone could look that radiant while so disheveled, still bearing every appearance of a sensuous, enrapturing Renaissance angel, even slumped in the chair, simultaneously looking entirely wrung out by life.

"You've been talking entirely about work," Hannibal observed, his cool, insightful tone the complete opposite of his fiery thoughts. "But there's something else on your mind today, isn't there, Will?"

Will huffed a sardonic laugh, more at his own expense than Hannibal's. "You mean in addition to the nightmares, the baffling occasional lapses into near-fugue state while I'm analyzing crime scenes, and the disturbing way I've been identifying with serial killers?"

Will rubbed his eyes, and his long, pretty fingers momentarily squashed his sweet face in a way which was entirely too endearing. Hannibal could just imagine what it would feel like to grip his face tightly during sex, applying a little too much pressure. He could almost hear the way Will would moan when being fucked hard and deep, and how such an experience would leave the young man feeling relaxed, resetting his frazzled mind set, opening up to the parts of himself he feared, the parts Hannibal loved the most.

"Yes, in addition to all of that." Hannibal greeted Will's bright blue gaze, when it flickered back to him, with a smile tinged in warm amusement. "Perhaps you are still concerned about

what happened last week, between yourself and Alana Bloom."

I know I *am still concerned about it. Deeply concerned.* Unsettled, even, perhaps. How mortifying. Hannibal was normally not given to jealousy in the least, so that the unique emotion frightened and embarrassed him when it manifested so powerfully at the thought of Will kissing someone else. Will, *wanting* someone else, pressing his lips to theirs with a sensuous, wet warmth that wasn't even *appreciated.* Alana Bloom was clearly a complete fool in prioritizing any other concern above the chance to kiss those perfect lips, but thank goodness she was so unfathomably idiotic. If the two of them had entered into a relationship in earnest, Hannibal would probably have killed them both.

Will fidgeted in his chair, racked with fresh anxiety. *Dear, beautiful boy.* He only needed to *relax*, give into who he really was. Hannibal had an endless list of inspiring ideas as to how he could help with that, but it waited for the right moment to reveal the intention. It was probably best he keep telling himself the hesitation came from his desire to play with Will like a toy, letting his sanity unravel before the boy realized just whose maze he had become entrapped in. Otherwise, Hannibal might have to face the severely discomforting notion that he was feeling *insecure* about his affections being returned.

"Yeah, I mean, kind of?" Will frowned self-consciously. "It's not specifically about Alana Bloom, but more a general concept, something I want, and I'm worried I can't ever have."

Hannibal knew the feeling all too well, except that his needs were quite alarmingly specific. Only his pride and self-protecting instincts remained to hide the craving.

"Please, tell me more," he invited. "Remember, this is the very definition of a judgement free zone."

Will laughed, that little self-deprecating laugh that broke Hannibal's heart every time, making him realize that heart wasn't quite as hollow as he'd once applauded himself it must be. He was far from impervious to wanting to soothe Will's dejection, especially the idea that Will in any way wasn't "good" or "normal" enough. Oh, to have the opportunity to spoil him, pamper him night and day, he would do almost anything. But his thoughts were rambling again; he was deeply annoyed to recognize the tendency and the fixation as not dissimilar to Franklyn's behavior towards himself. He wished he had the chance to snap the man's neck again in retaliation against his own weakness.

"I don't know if it's the sort of thing one really brings up in session. Seems more like advice I'd ask you as a friend." Will smiled, something closer to a nervous twitch than indicating any genuine warmth, but Hannibal grinned in return, taking it like a precious gift.

"I'm honored that you trust me in both capacities, so I suggest a change of roles." He stood, undid his tie, and slid it smoothly from his collar before unfastening the top two buttons on his shirt.

"What, um, what are you doing?" Will asked with a charming pink shade in his cheeks.

"I am no longer your psychiatrist, Will, I am your friend." Hannibal noticed the extra tension easing from Will's features as the boy let loose a laugh -- a real one this time, showing

appreciation for Hannibal's sly humor that made the killer add a wink just as a finishing touch.

He could not help wondering what had made Will so self-conscious for a moment there -- was it the bisexual awakening which he had been trying carefully to unfurl from the boy for weeks on end? Was it the top two buttons of his shirt that did it, at last?

"And as such, I suggest we go to lunch and discuss your romantic trials and tribulations in the appropriate setting." He checked his watch, affirming the time. "And to ease the flow of conversation, I think a beer with lunch would go down very nicely, don't you?"

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"So, this is fancy," Will remarked, looking indeed a tad out of place in all his flannel glory and a pair of trousers which Hannibal could only rightly term *disaster khakis.*

"I've selected the most casual of the restaurants I normally frequent," said Hannibal with a conspiratorial twinkle in his eyes. "Casual," by his standards, was still rather posh, and this was the sort of elegant establishment which he also considered worthy of Will.

He leaned forward slightly, in that way he had of reassuring and centering people whom he had a vested interest in keeping near to him, usually for strategic reasons...this was that, of course, but it was also *more.*

"I believe it," Will chuckled, and Hannibal secretly triumphed.

"I assure you, the menu is quite unpretentious. I'm confident you'll be able to find something pleasing." Hannibal felt himself absolutely glowing as Will nodded and began perusing the menu, his brow knitted as if he'd just been handed a complex chemical equation which he must solve post-haste.

He had drawn two real, heartfelt laughs from the younger man today. How many more times could he cause this to happen? Will must not realize he had the most beautiful smile in the world, but everytime Hannibal saw it, his soul seemed to be catching fire; his heart skipped multiple beats like stones skittering helplessly over a lake; he let out a breath he had not known he was holding. Surely these were tired cliches, not real phenomena taking over his entire human reality...was the infatuation merely a baseless illusion, a doomed hope that he had finally found his ideal match, a true partner?

What if he felt all of this for Will, and Will continued to see him merely as some...helpful confidant? The panic of that idea was altogether not to be endured; he pushed it down deep inside himself, hopefully never to be heard from again.

"Sparkling or still, sir?" The waiter appeared by Will's elbow, summoning the boy from his latest internal tangent. "Your water, sir, which do you prefer?" Will had frozen, blinking at the friendly man in confusion.

"Oh! Uh, still is fine, thank you."

“The same for me, please,” said Hannibal, noticing the way his quick solidarity on this completely unimportant point had solved the embarrassment which so often characterized the profiler’s social interactions.

Yes, Will was definitely the sort to despise having to order in restaurants, and what a wonderful realization this was -- after all, Hannibal would love to order on his behalf forever after. They seemed to have been made to fit together; each of Will’s softest inner layers perfectly suited for Hannibal to soothe and love until he felt all better. Some of the loving might involve breaking, all for Will’s own good, and he knew the time would come when Will would thank him for the deconstruction of his false nature, for setting him free from the cage of his mind.

“Hmm, this was probably a good idea,” Will mused, closing the menu and setting it down on the table. “I forgot to eat breakfast this morning and I *might* be slightly starving.”

Hungry boy, I wish I could feed you by hand, in my lap.

“Have you decided on a meal?” Hannibal replied, in lieu of making the invitation he really longed to extend.

“Uh, I don’t know.” Will shrugged, “I’ll just have whatever you’re getting, I guess.”

Hannibal pressed his hands tightly over his thighs as a wave of pleasure thrummed through his being, coiling heat in his low belly followed by a twitch from his thickening cock. Will’s voice, that barely-covered-up Southern drawl, the gravel in the manly tone, yet the innocent sweetness of him, it was entirely too much, so that adding in the idea of ordering for him was quite enough to set Hannibal off.

“You okay?” Will asked when Hannibal failed to reply for several beats, simply staring at him and trying not to surrender to the urge to have him here and now, in public, on top of the table.

“Yes, merely pondering my own choices. There are quite a few exceptional options on offer.”

Hannibal did so enjoy these occasions where he could speak unfiltered truth without being remotely understood. However, the amusement and relief of not exposing his real desires was wearing quickly thin. Really, he just wanted to be completely honest with Will, without having to worry about being jailed in result because Will still labored under the delusion he wanted to catch killers rather than become one. He couldn’t have Will running away now that he finally had him so close.

Completely in his element, shining with pride and joy, Hannibal enthused to the returning waiter, “We’ll each have the caramelized french onion soup to start, then the field greens salad with seared salmon, and for the main course, the tenderloin sliders with truffle fries. Oh, and a glass each of the Belgian sour ale, please.”

The waiter finished jotting down Hannibal’s cheery requests and breezed off again, leaving Will to cast his friend an impressed, if bemused look. “Don’t know how you do that.

Someday I'll have to get you to teach me your skill in ordering like that. I usually forget my own name when the waiter comes."

"No need for you to learn, Will; I have it well in hand." Hannibal knew he was taking a risk, that this was unquestionably rather flirtatious in tone, but Will merely rolled his eyes and chortled.

"Yeah, right, well...the more pressing thing I wanted to ask you about is this." Will tangled his fingers together on the crisp white linen tablecloth, his hands becoming a neurotic game of cat's cradle.

"Will." Hannibal intoned the syllable with authority and reached over to briefly enclose Will's hand with his own warm, larger one. "We *are* friends, are we not? Good ones. Your companionship has come to mean a great deal to me."

"Oh, that's," Will chewed his lower lip for a moment, looking in confusion from Hannibal's hand on his hot, slightly sweaty fingers, to his friend's calm, reassuring brown eyes. "Thank you, I do consider you a good friend, Dr. Lecter."

Hannibal squeezed his hand, then released him, arranging his napkin on his lap as their beers and soups arrived. "Well, then. Surely you must know that you may trust me with any confidence. My esteem for you is self-evident."

"Jesus, I." Will scratched the back of his neck and fiddled with his tall glass of cherry-hued beer. "Nobody else talks to me like that." His vivid eyes landed on Hannibal's with a great deal more confidence now, as if he had siphoned the feeling from the therapist's overabundance of it. His voice was steadier than it had been all day when he added, "Thank you, for not judging, and always hearing me out, the way you actually respect and care about me. I'm not used to it, so you'll have to forgive me if sometimes it weirds me out, but...it's a good weird."

"The best things in life are weird, Will." Hannibal grinned, his fangs gleaming as he raised his own glass to clink against Will's. "To unconventional friendships and fearless honesty."

"Cheers," Will smiled shyly, tapping his glass accordingly to his friend's.

Hannibal enjoyed the way Will dug into his food, as if he hadn't eaten in days and certainly hadn't tasted anything nearly so fine in years. While Will's table manners were entirely polite (he really was such a very good boy), he ate his soup eagerly, humming in pleasure at the taste, chasing it with the sweetly sour ale, giving an appreciative nod to Hannibal for his choices of fare.

The killer made no further attempt to prompt Will into speaking his truth; he knew Will particularly hated to be pushed in any direction. The profiler did not understand certain essential truths of his own nature, one of which his intense desire to be surrounded by a firm structure of discipline and guidance. He would learn, and in the meantime, Hannibal would wait, savoring his handsome friend's presence far more than the scrumptious cuisine.

“So I wanted to kiss Alana,” said Will suddenly when he had finished his soup and dotted the excess of it from his lips with a napkin.

Hannibal almost choked on his beer; it was the hardest trick of his life not to let the drink go streaming out of his nose. He swallowed carefully, then cleared his throat with a delicate pat to it. “Yes, as you mentioned.”

“But see, I think what I *really* wanted, what I actually *want* is...this is gonna sound so cheesy.”

“Complete honesty, Will.”

“Okay, yeah.” Will gave a short laugh, cutely self-conscious again but comfortable enough to go on, “I want...love. A relationship. Companionship. Shit, I think I wanna go out on...dates?”

Hannibal wondered briefly what Will thought they were actually doing here in the restaurant today, but he nodded thoughtfully, keeping his lips poised in a gentle smile. “Natural desires, especially for a handsome and vigorous young man who could surely find his share of very willing partners.”

The waiter cleared their soups and quickly replaced them with the salads, during which time Will regarded Hannibal with a very incisive look. It was quite possible that Hannibal had allowed his “crush” to be too apparent once again, but such risks were necessary, or they would merely remain deadlocked in platonic status for all time.

“I don’t go on dates,” Will elaborated, picking his fork over the salad as if he suddenly resented the grape tomatoes and succulent slices of fresh salmon. He sighed. “I don’t think I’ve ever even been on an actual *date.*”

“Don’t forget the dressing,” Hannibal said. He picked up the small glass decanter and drizzled a layer of parmesan vinaigrette over the greens on Will’s plate.

“Thanks,” Will mumbled. He took a small bite of food, then continued eating for a few more minutes, as if he suddenly realized this was delicious and he was still hungry.

“Well, you’re in your thirties, yes? And given your looks, I find it highly unlikely you are a blushing virgin.” Hannibal had chosen his words hoping they would cause Will’s face to turn red, and was highly pleased in his success.

“No, I’m...I’ve had plenty of sex.” He realized he had spoken too loudly and blushed even more. “God. I mean, I hook up with people sometimes, but I usually get the feeling they’re doing me a favor of some kind. Whenever I’m interested in a more traditional approach and actually get up the nerve to suggest a date, I just get turned down flat. Alana said it and she’s right, I’m unstable. On my best days, I’m prickly, surly…”

Hannibal struggled against a jolt of enraged, possessive jealousy that made him want to give Will a long, thorough spanking for referring so casually to his past encounters. As if Hannibal could hear about others touching him, kissing him, and more...complete intimacy...he

crumpled his napkin tightly on his lap, out of Will's sight. He dug his nails into his palm and said sweetly, "Really, Will, you underestimate yourself. And if you allow the habit to continue, you are giving your permission for others to underestimate you, too."

"So it's my own fault nobody wants me." Will hung his head with a dejected sigh. "Sorry, that sounds so pathetic. I guess I'm damaged goods, and it shows. I can't blame--"

"I can," Hannibal said sternly. "I blame anyone who can look at you without appreciating all of your many wonderful, charming qualities. As far as I am concerned, you are better off without such simpletons in your life."

"Thanks," Will nodded, wiping at his eyes.

Hannibal's heart squeezed and he longed to pull Will into his arms.

"So, I'm guessing a sophisticated guy like you probably doesn't have these problems." Will was forcing himself to cheer up, and while his statements and request for help were sincere, it was obvious he still felt miserable inside. Little did he know he had Hannibal's heart in the palm of his hand, that the older man was hanging on every word he said and every small sign of regard in his body language. Will did not remotely sense his own power, but Hannibal wanted to teach him how to own it.

"I keep busy and only date on the occasional whim," Hannibal explained, gesturing to the waiter. He needed another beer to endure this conversation without grabbing Will by the soft flannel collar and kissing him senseless.

"But when the mood strikes, you know what you're doing." Will pointed his fork at him, which would have been rude if it was anyone else, but the sly smile on the younger man's face made it entirely forgivable.

"You know what to wear, *obviously.*" He nodded at Hannibal's impeccable dark blue suit. "How to...I don't know, style yourself."

"I take pride in my appearance," Hannibal affirmed. "Are you asking me for sartorial advice?"

"Yes, and also, where and how to meet people. How to stop myself from self-destructing out of nervousness on a date, what to *say*, when it's okay to touch someone, how to...know when I want them to touch me. I'm just a jumbled up pile of perplexity."

My dear boy, you know exactly who you are and what you want. You simply insist on defying your brilliant instincts at every turn. No wonder you are driving yourself more than slightly mad.

"I can certainly offer counsel on these matters. I'm honored that you've trusted me enough to ask." Hannibal was supremely delighted, and it must have shown, because Will flashed a brief, angelic grin, as if the feeling was momentarily contagious.

“You know,” Will realized, looking down at the sliders and fries once they arrived, “I don’t think I can eat another bite.”

“Let’s take them to go. We can drop them off at my house on the way to our next destination.” Hannibal remained entirely nonchalant, as if his confident, dominating decisions on both their parts were obvious necessities.

“Our next destination?” Will raised his eyebrows.

“Yes, of course. You’ve asked me for guidance on a number of topics, and I believe I know the best place to begin your lessons.”

“Well, okay.” Will looked incredibly relieved and eager for this chance to learn from a master. Gratitude looked especially beautiful on him, Hannibal reflected.

Curious

“Oh, Dr. Lecter,” cooed Emiliano, the white-haired owner of the posh men’s suiting store where the therapist brought Will after lunch. In a heavy, florid Italian accent, he continued happily, “You have brought me such a charming untouched canvas with which to work today.”

Will glanced from the kind-faced man’s delighted expression to his own dubious reflection in the full-length mirror. He didn’t get it.

In fact, he felt pretty weird, standing on this round pedestal so he could be sized up, Emiliano circling him with dizzying expertise, measuring him with a long yellow tape. Surely a slightly nicer suit was good enough, and for God’s sake, what was a suit from this place going to set him back? Well, maybe Dr. Lecter was right; maybe it was worth the expense if it ended with him showing up to a date looking halfway decent.

At the moment, he was stripped down to his t-shirt, boxers and socks in the large private fitting room, and Dr. Lecter was standing with his hands folded in front of him, completely unfazed by all the fussing over Will.

No matter how *decent* he looked in his new suit, Will knew there was no chance he’d pull off that suave, debonair look halfway as well as Dr. Lecter, but then, such a goal was probably too lofty anyway. Dr. Lecter was all broad shoulders, firm muscle and slim waist, tall and effortlessly charismatic. While on the other hand, Will had purple circles of sleep-deprivation under his eyes so deep they were ditch-like; he had a tendency to sweat excessively for unknown reasons lately, his legs were skinny, his hair a mess, and then there was the fact that he was going not-so-slowly insane.

Funny, that he couldn’t seem to get a certain idea out of his head lately: the desire to be wanted, genuinely and fully, and even -- wildly enough -- to be loved. It wasn’t like he had any experience with being loved to compare it to; it was more of a shockingly deep chasm in the hard rock of his self-defenses and insistence on being just fine on his own. A *lack* inside him, the need to know how it felt to be one hundred percent cared for, never having to doubt it or wonder if the person just wanted a peek into his supposedly genius (actually rather horrifying) mind.

Was the relationship he longed for just a clutch for sanity and safety, as Dr. Lecter mildly suggested on the night Will kissed Alana? Or would some real dedication on his part to the doctor’s tutelage help him overcome this wretched state he’d been immersed in lately? Life had come to feel like a waking nightmare where he toed the line between hero and villain, constantly in danger of betraying himself through loss of control. You couldn’t exactly put *that* sort of thing into a Tinder profile.

“You are going to look magnificent, Mr. Graham,” Emiliano enthused, standing back and admiring Will like a car mechanic who had just been asked to fix a beat-up, dusty old car with some secret vintage charm that made it well worth the endeavor.

This guy needed to have his vision checked, but he seemed to know his stuff when it came to clothes. No doubt Dr. Lecter would never trust anyone less than the absolute best with his own apparel, or with Will's.

Sometimes Will couldn't believe he was so lucky, to have a friend like the kind, intellectually fascinating and slyly amusing doctor.

Maybe the therapist noticed the way Will's eyes were darting back and forth between himself in the mirror, his friend and the shop owner, his face showing confusion mingled with a small temptation to run.

"Will? Are you feeling alright?" Warm brown eyes crinkled slightly as Dr. Lecter's lips turned up in a gentle smile that eased Will's tension.

"Yeah, it's okay, I'm just not used to…" He waved around confusedly. "All this, especially the attention."

"Remember, this is supposed to be fun." The doctor's voice took on that rumbling, teasing tone it got when he was applying humor to ease the pained self-consciousness that defined Will's daily existence. As if he was placing pressure on just the right muscles during a massage, Lecter always seemed to know just how to make the discomfort go away; he was amazingly good at his job, Will marveled. Just as great at being a friend.

"Fun, right." He nodded, releasing a long breath to steady himself. There was fun to be had, aside from solitude in his little woodsy house with the dogs; there was life out there, and he deserved a part of it, right? *You've got to start believing yourself about that, or no one else is going to.*

Dr. Lecter's mysterious, intriguing eyes flitted up and down Will for a few moments, as if processing an instinct. For one strange second there, Will thought the older man was going to reach out and touch him in comfort, maybe squeeze his arm or pat his shoulder. He didn't know why he liked the idea so much; usually, he could only tolerate other people touching him -- well, almost never, just when he was horny, as a matter of fact. It just went to show him that they were developing a real friendship such as he'd never known before, making him okay with such platonic physicality, even able to take stress relief from it.

Will smiled and Lecter nodded, and that ended the brief, silent near-conversation between them about whether or not there would be touching. They were so comfortable with each other, he marveled.

He hoped that if he ever did have a girlfriend, she would make him feel steady and safe like that, and that he could do the same for her. It definitely wasn't going to be Alana (ha), but there must have been some qualities about her that represented what he did need, perhaps her softness and kindness, her intelligence? Obviously, it didn't hurt that she was gorgeous, although after her rejection, he noticed himself regarding her somewhat more coldly, feeling less drawn to her presence. Her friendship seemed sort of artificial, based more on the obligation to feel concerned than anything more sincere.

Emiliano had finished writing down Will's measurements. "Dr. Lecter, I'm going to bring out the newest in Burberry, Dolce and Gabbana...perhaps a Gucci? Can he be playful?"

Dr. Lecter looked askance at Will, who shrugged as if to scream, *help! I'm clueless!*. With an indulgent smile, the doctor replied to Emiliano, "Yes, I believe he can."

While Emiliano was away fetching the suits, Dr. Lecter approached Will slowly. "What do you see when you look at your own reflection, Will?"

"Am I to indulge this line of questioning, Doctor?" Will quirked a brow and gave him a sassy look. "After all, you said we were spending time together as *friends* today, and that was definitely a therapist question."

"If we're friends, I think you might call me Hannibal." Was it Will's imagination, or was the unflappable doctor blushing ever so slightly? Will nodded to the request, figuring it stood to reason.

After all, friends didn't go around calling each other "Doctor" and "Agent." Why had it taken so long for him to drop this formality? Will had so many walls up around himself that sometimes he found ones he didn't remember building.

Hannibal continued, "And furthermore, as a friend, I ask you to allow me the slightly invasive question, as it is a key part of my advice to you, which you did request."

Will sighed. Dr.-- *Hannibal* had him there. "Right, okay. So, my reflection." He tilted his head to one side, then the other, evaluating himself carefully. It had admittedly been a long time since he'd looked particularly closely at his own features.

"I'm alright, as far as looks go. Nothing special, but not useless. I think my eyes are a nice color, and my teeth are clean. I'm a little too thin because I've had a hard time eating properly lately, but I make it a habit to try and keep fit. I still have some decent definition, muscle tone. I think it kind of works against me that I don't know what to do with myself; jeans and plaid are a lot easier than trying to be *elegant*. My hair tends to look like I just stuck my finger in a socket, and it's a bit overgrown." He ruffled the curls to supplement his point. "Um, that's all I can think of. I don't spend much time concerned with my looks."

"Keep those thoughts in mind," Hannibal advised, adding no further commentary, which was unusual for him.

Emiliano reappeared, his arms overflowing with suits in shades of silvery grey, deep royal blue, equally regal plum, and one that was shiny with a pattern of black, brown and yellow polka dot-type things (that must be the 'playful' one; Will guessed Hannibal could get away with something like that, but him? Please).

"I really don't know about all these colors," Will fretted.

"Leave it to the experts to recommend the best shades for your complexion and features, Will," said Hannibal with a certain authority that made Will relax. Weird: he usually hated to be bossed around, but with his friend he seemed to crave it.

“Please do just call me if you should need any assistance, my friends,” said Emiliano chirpily. He flounced off, leaving Will to face down the suits like new enemies. He was going to look absurd, wasn’t he?

“I was kind of envisioning, like a plain black, or a slate grey…”

Hannibal’s expression was stern. Will liked it when his face did that, turning a bit stony, disapproving in a way that was strangely endearing. He got a little excited sometimes by this particular mood between them, Hannibal getting bossy, and the way it made him respond with deference. Was that a normal dynamic for men to share in a platonic friendship? Will wouldn’t know, of course, because he had no other real guy friends. Jack was his boss, Zeller and Price his snarking associates. Beverly was the closest thing he had to a regular “friend,” and being around her definitely never made Will feel like this, sort of sparky, his nervousness slipping into a new flavor which he struggled to define. Whatever it was, it was nice.

“Will,” the doctor said, halting Will’s baffled thoughts before they could blossom any further, “you’ve entrusted me with your...well, shall we call it a sartorial evolution?”

“If we must,” Will snorted. He removed his glasses and Hannibal took them with a courteous little *bow*; really, who was this man? They’d known each other for a couple of months now, and Will still wasn’t sure.

“If you trust me, that means you’ll listen when I tell you to do as you're told and start with the blue Burberry. It will bring out your eyes, which as you did mention, are quite a nice color.”

Will wondered how exactly this unique, fascinating man had become so sort of...casually regal, tossing off commands with such charm that saying “no” seemed ridiculous.

So he surrendered again, feeling that weird gratitude for the ongoing bossiness and hoping it would continue. He tried on the bright navy Burberry suit with a white shirt underneath, impressed at the way the fine wool felt against his body, structured but soft.

“It’s comfortable,” he offered, emerging from the curtained partition to see Hannibal smiling broadly at him, something like tender pride ablaze in his face.

“Now then, Will.” Hannibal offered a hand to guide Will onto the pedestal, which was...did friends…? But the doctor was speaking again, murmuring thoughtfully in his lush accent. “Look at yourself again.”

Will glanced at the mirror, expecting to see an obvious sheep in wolf's clothing, a badly disguised specimen of uncouth loser. Instead, he couldn’t help but notice he looked...handsome and smooth, actually. The blue in the suit really did make the color of his eyes pop, jewel-like. The suit was slightly too big, but otherwise followed the lines of his figure so that he looked slim and *elegant,* sort of enigmatic?

“Huh,” he admitted, running his fingers down the sleek lapels, “Not bad.”

“We both know that isn’t what you were really thinking. You do not have to say it aloud, but let yourself think the truth again, with regard to how you look. See?” Hannibal nodded to the

mirror, and Will examined himself again. “That rather devastatingly attractive young man in the glass. That’s you. And the man we saw a few minutes ago in the flannel and glasses who was so unsure of himself, that was the same person. You have it all inside you; life is only waiting for you to embrace it.”

Will blushed. “I honestly don’t know how to respond to any of that.”

Hannibal patted his back. “You don’t have to answer, my...that is, I only ask that you think about it for now. And why not try on the Gucci next?”

Four suits later, Will was exhausted with the whole concept of fashion. He decided he was happiest with the first suit, and asked if he could see it in a smaller size.

“Why, my good young man, if you like the suit, I will tailor it to you exactly,” Emiliano explained blithely.

Will had already winced at the price tag on the suit. A tailoring job on top of that, performed by an artist of Emiliano’s caliper? He worried he was going to be eating canned pasta for a few months after this, but he nodded in agreement.

“...in a few installments?” Emiliano was saying to Hannibal when Will emerged from the fitting room, buttoned back into his old self (was the Will in perpetually smudged glasses and faded plaid really the same person as the suited stranger who had surveyed him coolley from his reflection?).

“Oh, no need, I’ll pay the entire bill today,” Hannibal replied, so completely blase about the fact that he had apparently planned to purchase Will a suit from the beginning of this endeavor that Will’s jaw dropped.

“Hannibal, no,” he laughed, “You don’t need to do that, I’ve got it.”

“Will, I’m going to have to insist,” said Hannibal, but he didn’t use the stern tone again. He was merry and delighted, as if buying a wildly expensive suit for Will fucking Graham was some kind of *treat* for him. What the…

“It was my idea for you to come here, and I knew the cost when I made the suggestion. It’s my pleasure, I assure you.” Hannibal batted his pale lashes and smiled, patiently waiting for Will to reply.

“I…” His mouth had gone dry. There was a sort of…*stirring* happening in his heart, and it felt totally alien to him, like...a sweet, appreciative, *warm* embarrassment, but underneath that something kind of *daring* that nudged him to let the other man spoil him and even push it a little further in time, see how far Hannibal would go to please him. What a bizarre train of thought! Where the hell was this coming from?

Emiliano observed, “Dr. Lecter is always so very kind, Mr. Graham. You have struck it lucky in the friendship department.” He winked at Will, who was bewildered as to the meaning of that fucking wink. Was Emiliano suggesting something, and if he was, was it...true? What was going on here, what did it mean?

“Thank you,” he managed to blurt, and then Hannibal beamed at him with so much heartfelt admiration that it would be impossible for anyone to fake. Will wanted to let himself enjoy the glow of it for a while.

So he did.

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They took a walk in a well-to-do neighborhood of Baltimore afterwards, strolling down the sidewalk surveying a series of chic luxury stores offering every conceivable type of clothing or accessory. They sipped on the lattes they’d picked up at the cute, cozy little cafe where they had stopped in, Will insisting on paying despite the equally insistent voice in his head that wanted Hannibal to take out his smooth leather wallet again and slide out one of the several credit cards it contained. The conversation between them flowed easily, first with a game of them inventing conversation between the various couples and groups of friends they passed along the way. The game ended with Will in stitches, almost doubled over in laughter at Hannibal’s latest observation.

Hannibal watched him quietly, looking so flattered that he had made Will laugh. Will had to admit, his friend was good at it, and he hadn’t smiled or laughed this much in...hmm. When *had* he ever smiled this much?

Then they talked a bit about their favorite places to go for a drive in the area, until Hannibal paused in front of a jeweler’s shop that had an impressive display of sparkling diamond necklaces and rings, as well as some of the handsomest men’s watches Will had ever seen.

“What would you think about replacing this?” Hannibal inquired, tapping the battered old watch on Will’s wrist.

“I think we can go in and look, and you can give me some *advice* about which watch would look good on me. But we’re not buying one because I can’t afford this place, and you’re not spending another dime on me today.”

Hannibal’s lower lip jutted out a bit and Will wondered if he was actually pouting. “C’mon, teach me about watches,” he laughed, tugging Hannibal into the shop until the pouty lips turned up into a helpless smile.

Will tried on watches he never would have remotely considered touching in the past, Rolexes and Cartiers and such, for fuck’s sake. But he had to admit, Hannibal’s taste was once again flawless. His friend only selected the best and most attractive items from beneath the glass counter. Will was holding his arm out to evaluate the way the latest watch looked when a few young women happened to walk behind them, giggling so that he found himself distracted enough to eavesdrop on their conversation.

“*...Sugar daddy!*” Two of them whispered in unison, glancing at Will and Hannibal over their shoulders before they strolled over to the women’s jewelry, their hushed gossip out of earshot.

Will scowled. “That’s so ridiculous,” he fumed as Hannibal regarded him with calm interest.

“Is it?” Hannibal inquired archly.

“Obviously. I don’t know why you’re not more offended. I mean, they happen to see a...a…”

“A well-dressed older man consorting with a younger man dressed much more casually, looking at highly expensive watches?” Hannibal smiled, completely unbothered. “I can hardly blame them for drawing such a typical assumption.”

“But you’re not! And I -- I am *so not*...”

“A sugar baby?” Hannibal adjusted the band on the Cartier on Will’s wrist, admiring the way the diamonds sparkled. “Would that really be such a terrible thing? Many people are very happy with that sort of arrangement, and there is often quite an extent of genuine affection involved.”

“You and your theoretical questions, Doctor.” Will rolled his eyes. “I would never want to be in a relationship that was totally based on an exchange of superficial gifts for…” Whispering, he added, “Sex!” Returning to his normal tone, he went on, “I want something more, something real.”

“There are not quite so many boundaries between what any given relationship may be, as you seem to infer. However that may be, I remind you now that you can have almost anything you would like from this life, Will. It only remains for you to learn how to ask. As such, I propose we continue to the next part of our lessons, which will be based on your comportment and eloquence.”

Will laughed, “Have you *met* me? A project like that would take all night.”

“Perfect,” Hannibal shrugged. “You’ll stay the night at my house, then. We’ll have all the time we need.”

“I mean -- okay,” Will agreed awkwardly. “I could have Alana take care of the dogs, I guess.”

“It’s the least she can do.” Hannibal smiled smugly, as if he found something completely enchanting in the idea of Alana Bloom looking after the dogs while he got to have Will all to himself. Will was sure it must be his imagination.

“I’m surprised you haven’t suggested we stop on the way to your place so I can get a haircut,” Will chortled.

Hannibal shook his head. “Heavens, no. I wouldn’t advise you to touch your hair; it is one of your loveliest features and looks absolutely splendid at its current length.” As Will blushed, failing to think of a single response he could even stammer back, Hannibal picked up his hand and said discerningly, “A manicure, perhaps. I have everything we need at home. Since we will have all night, there will be plenty of time to discuss manners, etiquette, and flirtation methods, to prepare you for your upcoming dates.”

“I don’t have any dates set up *yet,*” Will replied, undoing the watch and handing it to Hannibal. The older man’s index finger swept briefly over the underside of Will’s wrist

where the skin was especially delicate and sensitive. He shivered, his lost blue gaze locking to Hannibal's deeply confident golden amber eyes.

"I'm sure you soon shall." Hannibal wasn't touching him anymore, unless a gaze could feel like a caress, but his skin still tingled where the doctor's fingers had brushed him.

"So we're going to...do our nails and talk about girls?" Will smirked, deciding his imagination was running away with him again, and he should use humor to get them back to normal territory. "It sounds like you're planning us a slumber party, Hannibal."

"And I can't think of a single thing I'd rather do," Hannibal grinned.

I can't help but care

Chapter Notes

> So this chapter is a bit of a monster, and still it didn't fit the whole sleepover! I had to pick a suitable place to split it into two chapters. Also, cw for extreme amounts of fluffiness and a very soft Hannibal

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal got to hold Will's hands for such a wonderfully long time whilst he administered the manicure, the two of them sitting close together at the dining room table. He had lain a towel over the tablecloth and arranged his accoutrements as usual with meticulous organization. Aside from the file, Will hadn't recognized any of the tools and even looked a little worried about the cuticle stick.

"Don't worry, Will," said Hannibal, roving his thumbs soothingly over his friend's. "You're in excellent hands. This won't hurt a bit."

Will flinched, and Hannibal saw goosebumps rising on his forearms where the sleeves of his flannel were pushed up. "Sorry, it's just that people don't touch me very often. I'm not used to it."

"I can instruct you to do the manicure yourself, if that is more comfortable," Hannibal suggested, starting to withdraw his hands.

"No, I don't mind," Will blurted, as if he was distraught he might have lost the touch that overwhelmed him. "It's nice when you...it's fine."

"You're blushing," Hannibal smiled, opening a bottle of lotion and squeezing a liberal amount into his palm. He reached out and Will gave his hands over again. "When you begin dating and meet someone special, are you sure you'll be content with the amount of physical touch that may be involved? Of course, it's completely normal if you aren't interested in intimacy."

Will turned redder, trembling a bit when Hannibal massaged the lotion into his hands, smoothing it over the palms, between the fingers, and then each one individually, paying careful attention to his work.

"I want...I like intimacy," Will answered at last, and Hannibal wondered how fast his heart was beating, hoping ardently that it was a match to his own hammering tumult. "With the right person. Maybe I like it a little too much, and I get, like you mentioned...overwhelmed. When you're only used to feeling bad all the time, especially about yourself, it's hard to handle feeling good. Hard to know how to take it."

Hannibal nodded thoughtfully, respectful of Will's feelings, pleased to hear that the boy was highly sensitive to touch, as he had dreamed he might be. He could only imagine his responsiveness in a sexual scenario, if Will could barely stand the pleasure of a simple touch from a loving hand.

"This lotion is scented with lavender, peppermint and rosemary," he explained, relying on his usual domineering monologue technique to keep him centered in purpose when his thoughts threatened to turn far too steamy to resist. "It's a naturally calming combination. Try and take it in."

Will inhaled and smiled. "That does smell good. I know my hands are in rough shape."

Hannibal massaged the lotion against the scratchy bumps of a few callouses from Will's work, where he had clutched a gun in fearful agony of how much he enjoyed the power; where he had labored fixing boat motors. It was admirable but doomed, how stubbornly Will relied on morally upstanding and wholesome tasks to try and smother his true instincts.

"You work hard, Will. You deserve to pamper yourself much more often." He began filing Will's nails, making the younger man raise his eyebrows when he didn't take them down to his fingertips.

"Isn't that a little too long to keep my nails?"

"I don't think so," Hannibal answered, as if conveying the breeziest pleasantries. He was so completely happy, he could do this all night long, but then again, he had so many other plans for how they could spend their time. "You have healthy, attractive nails, so why not show them off? In addition, chances are you might meet someone you'd like to scratch."

His eyes twinkled as Will stammered out, "Oh, I don't know," ducking his head.

After buffing the nails, Hannibal applied avocado oil, taking his sweet time smoothing the thick ointment to soften Will's cuticles. Then he pushed each one down with the stick, tenderly, with utmost focus. His other fingers pressed into Will's palm, not nudging out of place despite the sweat on Will's skin.

"Do you always run this hot?" he asked lightly, placing Will's hands down on the towel so he could apply a clear polish.

"Usually. Lately, I always seem to be like this. Guess it might be because of the headaches, they've been getting worse." Will shrugged, as if his body was an unimportant, broken toy rather than a beautiful and sacred vessel.

Hannibal gave him a disapproving look. "If you're having headaches, it is because you are running yourself ragged with this miserable work. Why not tell Jack you need to take a break? It's not too late to take him up on the offer."

"I don't want anyone to die because I wasn't there to help find the Chesapeake Ripper." Will watched with fascination, drawn slightly away from the serious topic by the way Hannibal

carefully slid the nail polish brush over each nail, leaving them shiny. The sensation must be a new one, and rather soothing to his hot temperature, as the effect would be cooling.

“I don’t want you to die because you’re so busy trying to protect everyone else in the world that you forget to take care of yourself.” Hannibal put the cap in the nail polish and twisted it shut. “Don’t touch anything for a few minutes; that will need to dry.”

“That was quite a sentiment you just came out with,” Will said, looking at him intently.

“I care about your well-being, greatly. I’ve mentioned it before.” Suddenly, Hannibal felt rather self-conscious, and averted his eyes from Will’s intelligent gaze.

Will was insistent on denying his true, murderous nature, a decision which -- no matter how subconscious -- was holding them back from each other. Until Will understood what he truly wanted in life and embraced his darkness rather than repressing it, Hannibal could never reveal his own secrets. Without honesty, how could they achieve intimacy? He felt frustrated by the continued necessity of the lies, but trapped in them all the same.

“If I took a break and let myself just *be* for a while, what do you think I’d realize? Where would I end up?” Will tapped his fingers on the towel, fluttering them and watching the way the light flickered across the sheen on his nails.

“While I’m not a mind-reader, I would like to think you might stop hiding so deep inside yourself, fearing your instincts.” Hannibal began gathering the supplies from the table, remaining very tentative on this topic. If he pushed it too far, Will would run away. If he placed the hints under Will’s skin in just the right way, it could bond them even closer.

He decided to add a little more of the authoritative tone which Will seemed to thrive on obeying. “It’s no wonder if you’ve made yourself ill, living the way you do.”

“Maybe I did,” Will winced. His nails were dry, so he stroked a hand over his stubbled jaw, his eyes widening in realization. “I’m sorry, I feel like I’ve made you worry. You have to know, I’m not used to anyone caring about me.”

“Perhaps you had better get used to it,” Hannibal suggested huskily. He sought Will’s eyes again and found them liquid turquoise, utterly stunning. Will smiled softly, taking Hannibal’s breath away just that easily.

“Guess you’d better get used to it too, then,” said Will. A heavy silence elapsed with prolonged staring, until finally he cleared his throat. “Um, what’s next on the agenda, now that my hands are presentable?”

“Next,” Hannibal announced, shaking himself from a deep, amorous reverie, “We’re going to be doing some role play.”

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“Let us envision the occasion in perfect detail,” Hannibal proposed as Will stood in the front entranceway of the doctor’s austere home looking completely lost. “Where are you planning

to begin looking for potential mates?"

"Thought I'd have to download one of those dating apps," Will confided. His thumb worked anxiously over a button on the sleeve of his plaid shirt, and he bit his already over bitten lower lip, the one Hannibal longed to suck and draw out between his own teeth. "Um, and there's a woman who works in the Admissions office at the Academy. Stacey. She's cute, and I thought maybe I could try asking her out?"

'Stacey', Hannibal fumed inwardly, surprised when actual smoke did not begin pouring from his ears. *She sounds absolutely obnoxious. I'd like to snap her neck.*

"Well, you needn't ask me for permission," Hannibal smiled courteously, smothering the murderous impulse for the time being. For now, Will was here with him, and if he worked his magic as planned, the beautiful boy wasn't going to be calling *Stacey* anytime soon. "Let us assume I'm Stacey, and you've just walked past me in the hallway at Quantico. How would you approach me and begin the topic of a possible date?"

"Oh, okay," Will laughed. He shook himself out like a theatre student backstage before a big production, and Hannibal couldn't help chuckling at the cute gesture.

"Will," Hannibal said with a warm smile, as if pleasantly surprised. "It's so nice to see you."

"It's great to see you, too, Stacey. How's your day going?" Will asked, looking delighted at how this was going so far, as if 'Stacey' was unexpectedly easy to talk to.

"Well, it's been a bit of a nightmare actually," Hannibal sighed, employing a dejected posture. "You see, I've got this party I'm supposed to be organizing for the Director, and it's been dreadfully taxing. I have so much work on my hands, I don't know how I'll ever get it done."

"Oh, no, that sounds exhausting," Will said in concern. "Listen, can I take any of the jobs off your hands? I'm pretty good with picking up supplies and setting things up, if that helps."

"Stop right there, Will." Hannibal shook his head and clucked his tongue, slipping his hands into his trousers' pockets. "You've just completely sabotaged any chance you ever had of taking Stacey out to dinner."

"But why?" Will looked so close to pouting that Hannibal wanted to pull him into a deep kiss and give his hair a nice hard pull. Why must Will's pale cheeks keep turning that appealing shade of pink each time he became nervous?

"It's exactly what I was afraid of," Hannibal revealed. "Once you have finished bending over backwards doing Stacey's work for her, you will find yourself so far into the 'friend zone' that you will never navigate out of it again."

"Fuck," Will groaned, "I'm terrible at this."

"No, you most certainly are not." Hannibal gave his friend's now very smooth and soft hand a brief squeeze. "You're simply new at it, and there will always be a learning curve. You are used to being the instructor, but in this lesson you must follow my guidance. You are used to

allowing people to take advantage of your kindness and capabilities, but in this case, you are stepping out into the world to shine in your own right. You are worthy of admiration and being met halfway."

"Thanks," Will said, scratching the back of his neck, looking out of his depths. "I'll, um…" His eyes darted somewhere they hadn't lingered before, to Hannibal's mouth, staying there for a few seconds. "I'll try again."

Hannibal's smile broadened. Soon, he would have Will eating out of his hand, quite literally. No matter that he wasn't quite sure if he wanted the boy there so he could manipulate and frame him, or so that he could keep him close forever, eventually placing a golden ring on his finger representing their eternal love. Given that Hannibal enjoyed taking life unpredictably and a moment at a time, indulging his whims accordingly, he decided to see where the relationship took him, ease up on his iron-clad defenses for once. He had nothing to lose; if things went badly with Will at any point, he already had everything prearranged to send him to jail for the Ripper murders.

Will smiled, turning up the charm. A sexy lilt came into his voice and he stepped slightly closer to Hannibal, his eyes sparkling. "Stacey, how would you like me to distract you from all of that hard work? A night out would do you good."

Hannibal wanted to slam Will against the wall and rip his clothes off. He felt a light sheen of perspiration breaking out all over his body as a wave of pleasurable anticipation swept him from head to toe. He was trapped in Will's thrall, astonished at the younger man's effortless ability to do this to him, strip away his armor and leave him feeling open and aching, needing at least a thousand hard, deep kisses to ease the enveloping yearning.

Instead of pinning Will to the wall and tearing his shirt open, Hannibal shook his hand, letting the warm touch linger. He didn't mind Will's sweat, nor the sickly-sweet scent of the encephalitis wafting from his feverish skin; he wanted every single drop of it all over him as they rubbed and rocked together naked in his sheets, tearing the bed apart in the heat of passion.

Will's instability, originally created by his repression but now aggravated by the illness, was a gorgeous fascination. He still wanted to *play* with Will, and he knew exactly how to tease out the sickness and let it intensify until it opened Will's eyes to what he really wanted. Only in madness could it be entirely clear, as he knew from his own experience. Madness was the medicine, and Hannibal was a very capable doctor. When the time was right, he would put a stop to the encephalitis, but it had not reached its height yet, and there was still plentiful time for play.

"Congratulations, Will," Hannibal enthused as Will grinned, thrilled to have succeeded. "I think you're ready for our next lesson."

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"So what's the best way to initiate physical touch on a date?" Will asked. "I'm old school, I guess; I usually just stick my hand out and hope the other person will take it while we're

walking, something like that. Let's just say I've had my hand left empty quite a few times over the years."

"That's a crime," Hannibal said with a soft smile and complete sincerity. His heart soared to the heavens every time he had the sublime opportunity to touch Will, and if he only had the chance, he would happily ensure Will's offered hand was never left empty again.

They had progressed from practicing Will's methods of asking for a date, to how to flirt and touch while actually out with someone, and although this part had been designed for Hannibal to take advantage of, there were wild butterflies swarming in his stomach that made it hard to see anything but stars, much less a clever master plan. Hannibal kept sinking a little too far into the fantasy that this was a real date, and hoping it didn't show. His pride was mortally offended, but his romantic emotions were spiralling so rapidly into chaos that he didn't have a chance at stopping it.

"And so here we are," Hannibal announced as they walked in wide circles around his backyard. The sun was sinking lazily into the sherbet horizon while they practiced small talk suitable for a first date and discussed topics to avoid.

Hannibal's yard was neatly maintained; his love of cooking ensured he kept a healthy and vibrant crop of fresh vegetables growing until winter curtailed the hobby. Although the autumn weather had been getting cooler, he still had some carrots, radishes and cabbages going strong, and they looked very well, along with a small stone fountain currently clustered by crisp gold and red leaves. He did rake the yard every day, but it seemed the fall was going by at light speed this year and the trees had released another deluge since morning. At any rate, he was pleased enough to show Will this aspect of his inner sanctum, and to share with him the lovely sunset painting the scene in dreamy pink and orange light.

"We've just had a splendid dinner together," he elaborated, "and decided to go for a walk to get to know each other better. Perhaps you're interested in taking my hand, and I might take it if you offered. But there are a few other, more subtle methods you might try as well. Tools for your arsenal, if you will."

"Are you going to include the old 'stretch and yawn and conveniently put my arm around your shoulders move?" Will smirked.

"Really, Will. Everyone knows that trick only works at the movie theatre. Now, for a moonlit walk, may I suggest that you try an even more 'old school' approach?" He smiled cordially and extended his arm like a Regency gentleman offering to escort him to the quadrille. "Tell me, if you were Stacey, how would you feel about me offering you my arm like this?"

"So, if I was Stacey and you were me?" Will mused. Hannibal nodded, his arm still held out. "Well, I guess...I'd think it was a sweet, sort of impressive gesture. Very gentlemanly. It might win me over."

"Note," Hannibal put in as Will slipped his arm over his and they practiced strolling around, "We actually have closer contact now than hand holding, yet because this is a more traditional posture, it seems quite chaste. Sometimes the most innocent gestures can ignite sexual tension, far more acutely than a direct approach."

“I agree with that,” Will decided. “I think that’s why I don’t want ‘the direct approach’ anymore. ‘The direct approach’ seems to involve someone trying to get into my pants as quickly as possible so they don’t have to listen to me talk anymore.”

“Appalling,” Hannibal frowned. “If it was up to me, anyone who treated you thus would find themselves…”

Will looked at him curiously and Hannibal ended smoothly, “In receipt of my strongly worded letter of rebuke.”

“Only if you use the office stationary and write it in calligraphy,” Will answered, and he was being so bold now, *teasing* Hannibal while they stood so achingly close, Will’s hand tucked securely over Hannibal’s arm with the delight of shared body heat and the smell of Will making his mouth water...that fevered sweetness laced through with a confused excitement, absolutely delectable. He could easily forgive the wretched aftershave which only lightly cloaked Will’s natural scent.

“Of course,” Hannibal chuckled, feeling heat in his own cheeks as Will watched him with interest.

“Hmm.” Will noticed, “You’re blushing.”

Hannibal’s heart was thundering, but he managed to overcome it, managed not to tremble as he answered, “Stacey would surely be blushing by now, if you turned the equivalent amount of charm on her. What would you do about her beguiling, bashful expression?”

“Well, I’d kiss her.” Will licked his lips and Hannibal’s palms were sweating, his eyes were laser-focused on that beautiful, tempting mouth, he was going under *fast* and there was no way to even attempt to hide it. Wouldn’t Will see, wouldn’t he understand? Could the dream be coming true, just that easily?

Hannibal didn’t have time to wonder when it had ceased being a wicked game and turned into a potentially one-sided romance that seemed to redefine his entire world, not when that world seemed to be hanging in the balance of whatever Will chose to do next.

“But luckily, I don’t need your advice on that part,” Will laughed, completely cheerful and apparently -- devastatingly -- clueless as to his friend’s inner torment. “I’m a pretty good kisser.”

He drew his arm from Hannibal’s and rubbed his hands together, pleased to have graduated yet another of the therapist’s lessons for the night. “So, what’s next?”

Hannibal’s mouth was dry, and his heart seemed to have shattered into thousands of tiny pieces all over the floor, too multitudinous to be retrieved. He was sure Will would smash the delicate shards, unfeeling, untouchable, triumphant, as he walked away from him, probably made some excuse not to stay the night after all as he would assume they were done here, and --

“I don’t know,” he answered blankly, processing his own panic with difficulty.

What was he doing? In this encephalitic state, Will should be easily manipulated to Hannibal's own purposes, yet Hannibal seemed to be wistfully expectant that they would simply both want the same thing, without him arranging it to occur, rather like setting up pawns on a chessboard (a method of proceeding through life which had never failed him before, but was rapidly, infuriatingly losing its appeal). He wanted Will to *want* to stay, with a childish, stubborn aspiration. It was maddening and unheard of, and he wanted it to *stop* so he could go back to psychic driving and serial killing and cannibalism, feeling fantastically smug, and life making sense!

Why wouldn't it make *sense* anymore?

Will looked at him, very thoughtfully, considering Hannibal's strange sudden indecision. Hannibal found himself completely unable to interpret the profiler's expression: did he suspect some, if not all, of the hidden truth inside his therapist's wicked mind and pathetically vulnerable heart? Was he merely baffled by the realization that sometimes even Dr. Hannibal Lecter experienced a moment of awkwardness?

Then, suddenly, Will's analytic but otherwise inscrutable look changed to a bright, decisive one. "Oh, I know," he enthused, "Dancing! We haven't covered that yet. I don't know how to dance at all. Do you?"

Hannibal went from drowning and burning in the molten lava of hell's inmost circle, to bouncing on clouds again just that easily. It occurred to him that perhaps he was equally as unstable as Will, without the excuse of encephalitis, but he could endure the realization because he was *back*! Rather than wanting to make an early end to their planned evening, Will was extending it enthusiastically, as though he had been trying to think of an excuse to do so!

Oh, I'm in love, Hannibal thought, barraged by the butterflies and thunder, the terrifyingly fragile hope, the dizzying sexual thrill of it all. He was floored by Will, who did nothing more special than to simply stand there looking stunning as the sun finished setting and Hannibal's face lit up in the dimmer yard.

Without further hesitation, he answered, with his accent much thicker than usual, "Why, yes, Will. As it happens, I am an expert dancer, and it would be my honor to teach you."

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Hannibal plugged his phone into speakers in the study, then he and Will moved the furniture against one wall and stood in front of the fireplace while a soft love song began to play, acoustic guitar with a woman singing of romantic hopes as breakable as his own.

He lifted one of Will's hands to rest up on his shoulder, clasping the other dear, hot and moist hand in his own. Then, swallowing, summoning all his bravery, but unable to fathom a single word in any of the many languages he spoke, Hannibal placed his other hand at the center of Will's back.

This was different, he thought, to confront Will in this tender capacity, teaching him such an essential skill with an amorous undercurrent they seemed to have mutually decided to keep

unspoken. It was frightening and new to hold Will in his arms, his own person suit barely intact. He was wearing only his white shirt and dark blue waistcoat and trousers now, and of course his shiny shoes which looked slightly absurd next to Will's scuffed brown boots. He loved the differences between them, the rough and tumble of this man who had taken his heart without even trying. There was Will, shyly looking up at him, settling his hand on the older man's shoulder with a tiny shudder about his jaw that said he, too, felt nervous in this moment. There were Will's eyes, big and pretty, his plush lips lightly touched by a tentative smile. Here was Will's firm, slim body, pliant in his near-embrace while he began carefully guiding Will through the first few steps of a simple waltz.

They turned around the room a few times, with Hannibal wishing Will had removed his flannel overshirt so he could enjoy just a little more direct contact with the heat of his skin, even through that adorable white t-shirt (size Small) that he always wore. Will swore under his breath when he stumbled slightly and stepped on Hannibal's foot, but all Hannibal could think about was the way the boy's fingers grasped his shoulder and hand tighter for support; his heart fluttered with it, and he couldn't care less about the slight sudden pain in his toes.

"Shit, shit, shit," Will muttered, looking embarrassed, "I'm sorry, I warned you I had no idea how to do this."

"Will, you're doing marvelously." Hannibal breathed in his wonderful presence like a fresh vigor of life itself, a shade of bliss he hadn't imagined could inhabit his previously lonely world. No matter what else happened, he would always treasure their first dance in his memory palace.

"All you need do," he added in his deepest, most soothing tone, "Is to let go of your reserve. Learn to follow my lead. Stop trying to control everything, and melt into the dance. It's something akin to walking on air, once you surrender all that you are to the music and movement. Can you trust me?"

Will's hand slid back and forth over Hannibal's shoulder a few times, probably just because he was gathering his thoughts and trying to center himself (an especially challenging task given that his mind was currently on fire, unbeknownst to him). But in the process, his touch had the effect of a massage on the strong muscle of Hannibal's broad shoulders. The doctor could have dissolved in a lovestruck puddle on the floor, but he maintained his composure somehow.

"Yes," Will murmured, his tone as dreamy as the sunset and the singer's voice, drifting over the shimmering melody, *you are the only exception, you are the only exception,* and they were moving again in perfect harmony this time, Will giving into Hannibal's confident direction. The firelight shone in Hannibal's eyes as he looked down at Will's delighted expression while the younger man began to feel it in earnest, that they moved as one, fluid and effortless, and he was learning well. It felt good; it was fun. They didn't need words to express Will's blossoming feelings about the dance. The soft, surprised smile on his face said it all, just as Hannibal's admiring demeanor spoke for itself.

This was entirely new for both of them: Will, to look up to someone and desire to please them, and to find complete fulfillment in the endeavor rather than harsh criticism, pained disappointment and rejection; Hannibal, to be satisfied in the here and now with nothing

more than holding this man in his arms, inhabiting a dream even if it was a doomed one; it did not matter. Will was his only exception.

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“You should be very proud of yourself, Will,” Hannibal beamed when they had waltzed three times with his pupil mastering the art to an extent which should not even have been possible. Will was so brilliant, it amazed him. Nothing could hold Will’s understanding back from something he was determined to conquer, despite that determination often being the one thing still holding him together. Hannibal should feel threatened by the obvious fact that this ingenious boy was certain to guess the identity of the Chesapeake Ripper any day now, despite all of his own machinations, but instead he was defeated by overpowering infatuation such as he had never known.

He knew that if Will gave into the dark impulses within himself rather than smothering them, he would be a spectacular, awe-inspiring killer. To hunt by his side and witness that glorious transformation was his dearest hope, or so he had thought. At present, he found himself equally delirious on dreams of making love and spoiling Will with as many gifts as he could possibly get away with, and once again it was all very, very *confusing*.

But this time he wasn’t going to give into the confusion and risk Will slipping through his fingers after those marvelous dances and how much they meant to him. He was going to keep this evening going, even elevate the gathering tension between them to the next level.

“So...what else does one do at an American ‘slumber party’?” Hannibal asked playfully, still ever so slightly breathless from the dancing as they stepped back from each other, their warmly clasping hands falling back to their sides as the inches between them increased, a change he hoped would be temporary.

Will laughed. “Well, if we were going to do it all the way--” He heard the suggestiveness in his own chosen term and turned pink.

Hannibal smoldered at him with besotted enthusiasm. “Yes?”

“Yes, well, I mean,” Will cleared his throat. “We’d probably eat a bunch of junk food, watch a cheesy horror movie and pretend not to be scared of it. Then we’d have to raid our parent’s liquor cabinet, or in this case, yours, do tequila shots and play Truth or Dare.”

“I have to admit I only understood about half of that,” Hannibal admitted, “But I am quite intrigued and eager to learn. Perhaps you should take on the role of instructor for the next part of our evening.” He leaned closer again, taking a risk that paid off when Will’s eyes drifted once again to his lips. “Come then, Will: show me how it’s done?”

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Hannibal was interested to learn that by “junk food,” Will was referring to such nefarious and overly processed items as microwaved popcorn, “Twinkies” (Hannibal had to take several moments to process that particular title), cheese puffs and “Twizzlers” (apparently that was the name for those stiff red vines which Hannibal always thought looked like pure plastic,

and completely disgusting). However, he had no such repulsive but supposedly compulsory fare in his otherwise vast stock of kitchen amenities.

“No big deal,” Will shrugged after they had searched through the pantry in a vain quest for “junk.” “Let’s just have the leftover burgers and fries from lunch.”

“Perfect,” Hannibal smiled, taking out his phone and tapping out a quick order for a liquor store delivery. “Is there anything more we need in order to perform ‘tequila shots,’ aside from the eponymous beverage?”

Will pulled himself up onto the center island and sat there with his khaki-clad legs dangling. Hannibal knew this was an abominably rude posture, especially in the sacred zone of his kitchen, but then why did the boy have to look so completely sexy and endearing while sitting there? His heart sang with the increasing realization that Will was totally comfortable in this house, in Hannibal’s space. And he was gazing so coyly over at him now, as though somehow enchanted by the overly verbose way Hannibal liked to phrase things.

“Just some salt and limes,” the younger man explained, his voice much more casual than the intent but mysterious glint in his eyes.

“Perfect. I already have those, which makes me feel quite well-prepared, despite my lack of...what do you call those revolting, slightly curved potato crisps that come in the eyeball-assaulting bright neon cylinder?” He leveled Will with a sly smile to rival his own. It really felt as if they were flirting quite overtly, yet he still could not quite discern Will’s conscious understanding of it, or his intentions on the matter.

“Ha! Those are Pringles, and they are definitely not *revolting,* especially the salt and vinegar ones. Come on and show me what you’ve got for movies.” Will hopped down from the counter and walked through the kitchen, heading for the sitting room where he had previously noticed a large flat-screen television hidden behind a curtain (aesthetics, obviously, were to be preserved despite the occasional hankering for a film viewing).

Hannibal took a few quiet moments to himself to enjoy the way Will’s supple, pert ass filled out his trousers and swayed as his hips swung. Then he followed his favorite patient into the study, where Will leaned to examine the small collection of DVD’s stored in the cabinet beneath the t.v.

“Hmm...these are mostly art documentaries,” Will observed, and Hannibal had to wonder if he was leaning over and sticking his gorgeous behind out like that on purpose.

His fingers itched to spank that incomparably perfect derriere, but he restrained himself with a simple, murmured, “Yes” while his eyes remained locked on the beauty before him.

“The complete works of Stanley Kubrick?” Will glanced at him with a wry look, then continued, dragging his finger over the dvd spines, as if he enjoyed marking Hannibal’s territory as his own, “And a lot of David Lynch.” He stood fully and decided, “None of that will work, see, because we need an actually *bad* horror movie. Preferably a random sequel from the ‘80’s, you know, like one of the eight million sequels to *Halloween, Nightmare on Elm Street,* or *Friday the 13th*?”

“I’m sure we can find one of them on streaming,” Hannibal proposed, taking up the remote and flicking the television on, navigating through the various rental titles in the Horror genre. “Why, though are we intentionally choosing a film we know to be poorly made?”

“Well, that’s the fun of it,” Will smiled, bumping his arm to Hannibal’s shoulder. He was so lovely and irresistible when he was playful, Hannibal thought, so mischievous and sparkling. As much as he had previously enjoyed spending time with the profiler, Hannibal couldn’t have known what it would feel like to spend such a luxuriously long period alone with him, having Will’s attention all to himself, or having Will so relaxed. He never wanted Will to leave, and that was obviously a problem, but a problem for later.

“You’ll see,” Will murmured, carefully watching the titles going by until he said, “There, stop! That’s one. *Nightmare 3: Dream Warriors*. Total classic.”

“Excellent,” Hannibal declared, although he truly couldn’t see how this dubious film was going to be entertaining in the least.

How could a ludicrous looking fellow like this cartoonish killer on the cover illustration possibly hold their interest or inspire the least amount of dread? It didn’t matter, if it was what Will wanted. He decided to ignore the possibility that if that sort of thinking continued, soon they would be surrounded by dogs, going fishing every weekend while he languished in want of his opera and keeping the house obsessively clean.

“I’ll go and heat up the food,” he announced, and Will settled on the couch looking once again entirely at home, even sliding his shoes off, propping his lovely feet up on the footstool. As he wriggled his toes slightly, Hannibal found himself caught up in the sudden and profound desire to take Will’s socks off and lick his feet, then bite each of his ankles until Will writhed and moaned.

“Can you bring some ketchup, too, for the fries?” Will asked, oblivious to the way he had just thrown Hannibal for another loop.

“Yes, of course,” Hannibal said, feeling distinctly like a well-appreciated, doting house husband as he bustled back to the kitchen to make them the perfect movie snack plates.

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“I’m surprised you are able to watch this film without being profoundly disturbed,” Hannibal marveled a half hour later, as they watched a young Patricia Arquette wielding a razor to hold back the mental hospital guards as she sang a chant to keep Freddy Krueger at bay. “Despite the admittedly cheap production value, the theme of an inescapable nightmare world seems to ring too true to your own recent trauma.”

Will kept his eyes on the screen as the brave young woman insisted her wild, horrifying visions were real, although almost no one believed her. “Actually, I find it reassuring. Someone thought up Freddy Krueger, or else he simply emerged from the collective unconscious. We all know him, in some way, right? I’m not the only one who’s ever been held hostage by a nightmare.” He smiled and nudged Hannibal’s foot with his own, sending a

shiver through his friend that had nothing to do with the creepy scene in the film. “Also, the soundtrack is great, and you’ve gotta love those ‘80’s make-up effects.”

“It’s comforting because you can relate to it, but it’s not real,” Hannibal concluded. “As if by extension, your own ordeal may someday be revealed as nothing more than a nightmare. As if someday you will awaken whole and adjusted in your life.”

“Maybe, Doctor,” said Will with a smirk, not looking at Hannibal but driving him wild with his subtle, seeming-flirtation. “Or maybe it’s just a lot of silly fun.” With great amusement, he sang along with the teenaged character on screen, “*One, two, Freddy’s coming for you…"*

As Will grinned at him and wriggled his fingers threateningly, it was easy for Hannibal to envision a much younger Will watching this film a dozen times until he had it memorized.

Will watched the movie contentedly, and Hannibal watched Will, carefully, when he thought he could do it without being noticed. He only wanted to see the way Will’s face and body language changed when a scene struck him as amusing, strange or exciting, and he couldn’t seem to get enough of it. He imagined they were a couple already and that they had “movie nights” all the time. His heart ached. What innocent pursuits for him to think of, when usually his desires ran strictly to the maudlin and macabre, much to his previous delight.

Since he was looking with such fixation at Will’s pensive profile, Hannibal was slightly startled when all of a sudden Will jolted in fear. His hand shot out towards Hannibal’s and scooped it up, causing the older man’s heart to leap into his throat. He was already looking at Will, and it happened so fast, he couldn’t pretend otherwise when Will was all of a sudden looking back. Will had to process it all at once: that the “cheesy” horror movie had genuinely frightened him, and that Hannibal had been staring at him with softly intense fixation. And their hands were clamped together, both of them seeking comfort for their own reasons.

This was much better, Hannibal decided, than the “old stretch and yawn and subtly throw one’s arm around someone” during a movie. This was mutual, sincere and deep. The room was dark, since Will had requested turning the lights down to make it “like a movie theatre.” Their faces were cast in the glow from the big t.v. screen, and their hands together were warm, getting hot. Hannibal wanted to thread his fingers through Will’s, but somehow he was afraid that if he moved, he would shatter the moment.

“It’s ridiculous,” Will laughed, embarrassed. He bit his lip, which Hannibal both lived for and wished he would stop doing. It was too luscious, innocent, naughty and tempting; heat crawled under his shirt collar, tickling his neck. “I’ve seen this movie a million times, I can’t believe that scared me.”

“It’s quite alright.” He felt his eyes growing brighter, felt the mood shift to the way he had reacted when he saw Will after fearing he’d been murdered by Tobias Budge. Pure gratitude for Will’s presence made him giddy and filled with foreboding all at once; how long could this last, this impossible balance of emotions that could not possibly coexist?

No it wasn’t “alright;” Hannibal was falling apart. He was going to die if he couldn’t kiss Will, hold him through his fears, show him it wasn’t really fear but inspiration, a premonition of his future Becoming. But he waited, and Will looked down at their joined hands with a

look Hannibal couldn't read, and then Will moved his fingers away, for whatever reason he thought he should. Hannibal's hand was left empty, but his heart was overflowing.

A few more scenes went by, with Freddy dispatching several more brave teenagers (for once, Hannibal found himself on the victims' sides, as they were quite compelling and smart, whilst Freddy only drew his resentment: he had never harbored tolerance for those who preyed on children). They sat in companionable silence while the wheels turned and turned in Hannibal's mind, bereft of solution.

Finally, Will spoke again, almost absent-mindedly: "I was twelve when this movie came out. I can still remember watching it on VHS. How old were you?"

"The year was 1987?" Hannibal asked, trying to remember from the film description. Will nodded.

"I was twenty-two, then," Hannibal concluded.

Will looked at him with a mysterious fascination.

"What is it?" Hannibal asked, dying to know.

"It's just...you're a lot older than me." He said it frankly, with a complicated amusement that wasn't really humor, but something deeper, more self-conscious.

"I wouldn't say 'a lot older,'" Hannibal corrected him, feeling a bit worried all of a sudden that perhaps Will did not regard their age difference as sexy and exciting, the way he did, but a possible impediment to greater intimacy. Was he really *that* old, after all? His ego said, *of course not* while his poor, bewildered heart, which prior to meeting Will was barely aware of its own existence, bleated out a plea for redemption.

"It didn't mean it as a bad thing," Will said, so kindly, Hannibal thought he was going to faint. "It's just an interesting, um…" He looked back to the screen, then to Hannibal's expectant face, then back again. "It's an interesting element to have in the mix between us, I guess."

"Yes," Hannibal said, trying to smile and finding he couldn't. Instead he moved his hands nervously over his knees, wishing he had managed to find a comfortable way to sit on the couch beside Will, instead of remaining stiff and nearly frozen with indecision over how to proceed. What was Will thinking? If only he could know. "Yes, it is."

Chapter End Notes

-The song for the waltz was "The Only Exception" by Paramore.
-I picked *Nightmare 3* almost at random, then remembered it also stars a young "Larry Fishburne" 😂 I'm sure Hannibal and Will commented on the actor's resemblance to Jack while watching the movie.

Next up: tequila, truth or dare...and bedtime!

Can we just sleep in my bed?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will Graham lived a muddled existence. It had been approximately never since he last had a firm understanding of his own needs, wants, or motivations. *Inspiration* was easy to access, but he had to smother it because his dreams were filled with blood and ecstasy, and that was a very wrong combination. He believed he was very *wrong* inherently, in his basic make-up, deep inside. Maybe that was why it was easy to relate to the twisted minds he encountered through his work. On the other hand, maybe that wasn't all there was to it; maybe his fantasies and recently the thickening, real-feeling dreamscapes drenched in viscera and filled with teeth were ambitions. All he wanted to be was a good man, but he was undercut from within at every turn, and he had to hide it, a constant matter of hard, exhausting work. He often felt unworthy.

He didn't feel unworthy now, standing in Hannibal's kitchen wearing a borrowed set of navy blue, silky pajamas with white piping, watching his friend cut up the lime into slices for their tequila shots. When he was with Hannibal, he felt understood, and centered -- anchored, really, by the other man's esteem, however misplaced it was. The way Hannibal cared about him was so genuine, it pulled something new out of Will which he hadn't expected and he didn't know how to identify -- much less what the hell to do with the feeling.

Will pretended to study the tall bottle of tequila which had arrived a little while earlier from the liquor store delivery, his brow furrowed as he did his best to secretly observe Hannibal from under his lowered eyelashes.

Hannibal was peaceful in the kitchen, always, as he was now, sinking the knife repeatedly, with effortless skill to create an attractive array of bright lime slices which he arranged in an aesthetically pleasing circle on a plate with a salt shaker in the middle of it. The doctor was a handsome man, as anyone would notice, as Will had managed to notice many times before without placing much emphasis on it; but now, he felt almost hyperaware of it -- as though for weeks he had been subtly taking it in without fully realizing it *stirred* something in him, the unidentifiable, intensifying feeling he didn't know what to do with. But he didn't want it to stop happening, like it did now, when Hannibal finished his work with the limes and smiled over at him, easily figuring out that Will had been staring (again).

It was just like earlier in the day, at lunch, and even more so when they were out shopping: Hannibal seemed to have this magnetic pull, a charismatic, charming, sophisticated, kindly, deeply intelligent energy -- and also, due to the age difference and slight power imbalance of their positions in the relationship (since Hannibal was also his therapist), the older man had a certain addictive knack for teaching, guiding and taking care of Will. Will, who had never had anyone take care of him, who had made himself so stubbornly alone and independent. And Hannibal was too -- set in his ways, amazingly autonomous, so fucking cool and smooth. Impressive, always. In their own ways, each of them had established their existence in the world as something completely insulated, that they would go out among others as

needed but without emotional attachment. Will didn't know why Hannibal kept himself so carefully enclosed in his elegant exterior, his unflappable dominance of every situation. He only knew that his own independence was starting to feel more like loneliness, and it never had before their friendship began. As a matter of fact, even his desire to date had been a nonentity, pre-Hannibal.

What if the kiss with Alana had arisen from the slow shift of new emotion growing inside him, but Will had simply misinterpreted the source and direction of the need? What if...it seemed absurd, impossible, too unprecedented to be fully comprehended, but yeah: what if it had been Hannibal who Will wanted all along?

He had never been with a man before, had never even considered it; he just assumed he would only be attracted to women, because that's how it always was. Now, with every touch they shared, every charged moment of eye contact, the wonderful, natural way they related to each other and bonded and had *fun*, actual fun, Will felt swept away by a wave he didn't want to resist.

All night long he'd been distracted by trying to analyze and conclude the meaning of the attraction, and all night the feeling intensified past a want he had ever known for another person. He was falling deeper into those cinnamon eyes and that soft smile that seemed to be reserved just for him, the way Hannibal's silver-strewn hair would sometimes fall across his brow, pretty and handsome all at once. He had never spent so much time thinking about another man's appearance, but when it came to Hannibal, how could he *not?* Hannibal, with his sleek cheekbones, full lips, those adorable teeth that kind of looked like fangs, but in a sexy way...and yeah...Will had been thinking about his strong body, his powerful hands, about having them *on* him.

It was no wonder he had been blushing almost all night.

Will had been playing with the feeling, letting it unfurl from him before pulling it back in out of fear from inexperience and the worry of being wrong about Hannibal's reciprocation and making an idiot of himself with yet another unrequited crush. He kept getting close only to pull away, and he just didn't think he could be mistaken that it was driving Hannibal more than a little crazy. Will often struggled with separating his own emotions from those he interacted with, and here especially it was a challenge, because he and Hannibal seemed to share a connection that blurred the lines between their separate thoughts and feelings. But how could there be any questioning the way Hannibal held his hands during that manicure (he still couldn't quite believe he had submitted to that -- but how had any of this day happened, except that Hannibal offered and gave him that all-knowing, coy look and Will fucking…*submitted*)? So tender and gentle, the way no one had touched him. To Hannibal, he wasn't an annoyance or a disturbance or a tool to use up until it broke; Hannibal truly enjoyed Will, and it was intimidating, the glow of it that made Will want more and more and more.

How could there be any questioning that dance? Never in his life had Will experienced an event he could absolutely identify with the term "romantic," but as he swayed to those poignant lyrics and that sweet melody with Hannibal holding him like treasure, he *felt* it, and his heart was flooded in a tentative happiness that scared him.

No one had ever spoiled him, given him treats, done whatever he wanted, and this was addictive too, but Will did not think it would appeal to him if it was anybody else being like this. With anyone else, it would feel weird and uncomfortable, as if he was being objectified, treated like a cute little "sugar baby" for an older "daddy," but when it came to Hannibal, Will never had one second of doubt that the man's behavior came out of true admiration and affection.

The time period for acceptably platonic staring, if there was such a thing, had long since elapsed. Will stood there with the bottle of tequila in his hand and his heart pounding out question after question, gazing at Hannibal in a baffled thrall. Hannibal, dressed in white pajamas and a smooth black robe, seemed equally content to remain right there, leveling Will with a smoldering look that made heat tingle all over Will's body. It felt so sexual, and God...what that even be like? Sex with a man, with Hannibal...someone bigger than him to take him over, spoil him in different, *naked* ways, *Jesus,* he had to stop thinking about this before he got hard.

He couldn't stop thinking about it.

"Something on your mind, Will?" Hannibal asked, and it was so annoying but so hot, because he was using his fucking "therapist" voice, all professional and smooth, making Will want to answer with something provoking and call him *Dr. Lecter,* as in, *take me to bed, Dr. Lecter, I require your full attention...*

What?

Will blinked rapidly and laughed. "Yeah, just, um…" Well, he had to think of something to say, for fuck's sake. Distractedly, his eyes, running from Hannibal's incisive gaze, happened to land on the liquor store receipt. It struck him that Hannibal had left it out on the counter, as if he wanted Will to see it. He set the bottle down, having held it while thinking confused sexual thoughts for so long without actually seeing it that this was the first time he noticed the fancy crystal of the bottle and the name, *Clase Azul Extra Anejo*. Hmm, he'd never heard of that tequila brand before.

Will's jaw dropped when he read the receipt and he stared at Hannibal aghast. "Hannibal, this is a fifteen hundred dollar bottle of tequila."

Hannibal strode over to him, carrying the plate of limes and salt. Hovering close by Will, he murmured, "You wanted tequila, now you have it. And in my opinion, you should never have anything else but the very best available. I hope you'll enjoy it."

"Well, we can't drink all of this in one night, it's gonna last a while." Will looked up at Hannibal, letting his eyes go wide and innocent, wondering where these instincts had been hiding all his life.

He'd always struggled with how to flirt, but with Hannibal, he seemed to be five steps ahead of his anxiety and shyness, even using his natural and sincere bashfulness to infuse his words and actions with a sultry, inviting attitude.

Hannibal stared at Will's lips, so Will licked them, then sucked his lower one in his mouth, feeling engulfed by the doctor's presence, the immensity of the erotic impact of it on him, which seemed...life-changing. The new him, the new Will, unafraid to take what he wanted. Still, he wanted to let this lay in the air between them for a while longer; he was still figuring it out, and plus, the flirting seemed to be making Hannibal almost feral, however well the therapist managed to appear serene. Will could see the storms brewing in Hannibal's fierce eyes, the way his mouth just barely tweaked into a severe sort of smile that was almost...threatening. Sure, Will had heard about people discovering various kinks later in life, but this was ridiculous; he seemed to be stumbling on a new kink every few minutes.

"Then I'm pleased with my selection," Hannibal said, finally. "It gives me an excuse to invite you over again soon for more tequila."

"You don't need an excuse," said Will softly. He felt so *soft* inside, small and needy, even greedy. Normally, this would bug the hell out of him, but here and now it was delicious; he felt so safe to just feel how he did. He felt that his needs matched Hannibal's, that his "submissive" had its equal match in Hannibal's "dominating."

"Will." Hannibal's expression was so complicated, even Will with his great empathy was thrown for a loop in trying to pinpoint its meaning. It seemed as if Hannibal was wordlessly scolding him for being so bold if there wasn't going to be any follow-through, it felt almost like his name had become a word of caution. It felt like Hannibal saying *"you are playing with fire."*

It remained to be seen if Will could handle the heat, so for now he said lightly, "Where should we do this?"

Shit! That sounded like a come-on, too. Will was starting to worry he was actually *too* good at flirting with Hannibal, which came as a huge shock after thirty-seven years of living in the world without ever possessing "game."

"Sek mane," said Hannibal thickly in his native tongue, still lavishing Will with those big brown eyes full of so much apparent desire, it blew him away.

Will laughed nervously, turning redder when he realized it had come out sounding like a boyish giggle, *why did that keep happening?* It made Hannibal look like he was going to spank him or something, *fuuuccckkk* why did that suddenly seem like the best idea he'd ever had?

"Huh?" Will said brilliantly.

"Hmm?" Hannibal replied with equal wit and focus. "Oh, that is, follow me, please." He tossed a seductive look over his shoulder and added, "bring the tequila."

Hannibal turned and walked out of the kitchen and down a hallway followed by a short set of stairs which led to his bedroom, and Will realized where they were going around the same time he understood that he had made Hannibal so overwhelmed, the doctor had momentarily forgotten how to speak English.

How could *he*, a frumpy, eccentric professor who had previously believed himself bereft of charm, have so affected this confident, gorgeous, brilliant man? It was enough to give Will a boost in his own self-esteem, make him finally see himself as something better than an occasionally useful mess.

As he trailed Hannibal into the bedroom and they sat on the little couch at the end of the bed (Hannibal's furniture was so classy), Will felt…*sexy.* Desirable. He loved the way it felt, he loved--

Did he *love* Hannibal? Or just the way Hannibal made him feel? How could he know the difference?

"Now, you'll have to instruct me," Hannibal said cutely, placing the limes and salt between them. "Why did we need salt and limes, of all things?"

Will picked up one of the shot glasses which Hannibal had placed between lime wedges and lifted it up as if to indicate, "watch me." This was not an act which Hannibal ever struggled to follow through on. He could feel those caramel eyes locked to him as he filled two shot glasses with light brown liquor and then rolled his pajama shirt sleeve up to his elbow. As he lifted his wrist towards his mouth, Hannibal's pale brows lifted.

"I know this seems weird, but the salt balances out the burn of the tequila." Will grinned at him, a little proud to be an expert in something which Hannibal was clueless about.

He licked his wrist, keeping eye contact with Hannibal, being coquettish, and Hannibal's hands tightened on his knees; his eyes burned into Will's.

"Now," Will murmured, his voice low and sultry, "You put some salt on the spot you licked." He sprinkled the salt although his hands were shaking and some of it landed in his lap, causing Hannibal's eyes to flit down to his groin and back to his eyes. Will's heart sprang into his throat and his cock began to stiffen in earnest. *Oh, my God.*

"Um. Then you have to lick the salt and do the shot, fast." Will quickly went through the process, before he lost his nerve. The salt tingled on his tongue like the heat of Hannibal's stare, and the tequila still burned going down, but sweetly. Damn, that was good tequila; he couldn't even fault the price tag.

Smiling, proud again, *showing off*, for fuck's sake, Will followed the shot up by grabbing a lime wedge and biting into the sour fruit, enjoying the burst of fresh, tangy juice on his tongue. He moaned softly and licked the excess juice from his lips.

Hannibal reached out and traced Will's plush lower lip where a bit more lime juice, mixed with his saliva, was still dripping. Will closed his eyes and swallowed, feeling the slight buzz of alcohol mingling with his desire to lick Hannibal's thumb and put it in his mouth to suck. He thought about Hannibal pressing down firmly on his lower lip with his thumb, then sliding three fingers into his mouth, nice and deep and foreshadowing, and -- his breath stuttered.

Will gawked, red-faced as Hannibal licked his finger, the one that had teased Will's lips. "You had a little something just there," Hannibal teased, and Will desperately hoped these pajama pants weren't going to cling to his burgeoning erection.

It was bad enough the way the fabric felt against him with just the thin cotton of his underwear between them and his bare sex, so smooth, silky and sexy.

"Your turn," he said quietly, intently.

Hannibal mimicked Will's procedure, and when his broadly soft tongue came out to generously lick his wrist, Will couldn't decide his favorite place to look -- Hannibal's strong forearms and...Jesus, who had a sexy *wrist*? But it was, because every inch of Hannibal seemed to be beautiful and entrancing. Or the doctor's face, lusciously focused, his lovely mouth wrapping around the shot glass and taking it down, biting delicately into the lime so that Will had an immediate vision of Hannibal doing the same to his thigh.

"Hmm," Hannibal mused, "An amusing, if bizarre, ritual around taking a simple shot of alcohol."

"That's what makes it fun," Will smiled. "So, ready for Truth or Dare?"

"I imagine the rules are self-explanatory."

"Yup. You can go first -- ask me either for a truth, or give me a dare."

"What is your most embarrassing sexual fantasy?" Hannibal asked, so fucking quickly Will was absolutely positive he'd decided on this question ahead of time.

"Fuck," Will chuckled. His face felt so red, between the tequila and the question, that he was worried soon he would turn purple. "Too late to ask for a dare?"

"Are you sure you'd want to partake in the dare I might suggest?" Hannibal purred.

Yes! Will thought, imagining them kissing, slow and wet and deep, then fast and hard with teeth -- *No, I'm scared. But yes! No?*

Screaming internally, he managed, "Okay, we'll go with the Truth." He did another shot as Hannibal watched him patiently. "I like the idea of somebody being in charge of me."

Will's gaze collided with Hannibal's again and he could feel their hearts pounding hard, as if in unison; he saw the way Hannibal's breath caught, as if he tasted Hannibal's ungiven kiss, earthy and sweet with tequila.

"In bed," he clarified. "I've never done that with anyone, but I've thought about it for years."

"About being submissive," Hannibal concluded easily. "Why haven't you done it, if you've wanted to for years?"

"I was afraid to ask," Will laughed, but the laugh was suddenly too sharp and painful, like the memory of all the times he stifled his specific sexual proclivities because he just wanted to

please the other person and they never bothered to ask what he wanted. They just took what they could from him, then left him in the dust. “See, there’s not much point in revealing something so sensitive and vulnerable to someone who really doesn’t give a fuck about you, someone who’s never going to call you again once you’ve had sex. Gave me the sense that’s all I’m good for.”

Hannibal’s hand slid forward behind the tray of limes and salt, landing briefly and gently on Will’s. “You’re revealing it to me.”

“Yes.” Will said bluntly. “Truth or Dare, Hannibal?”

“Dare,” Hannibal requested, bold and fearless about whatever Will might request. He was always bold and fearless, except when it came to the tender softness deepening between them by the moment.

“I dare you to streak,” Will grinned, mischievous, using the same old dare everyone always used at teenaged slumber parties, although it had never seemed quite this appealing.

“What precisely does that entail?” Hannibal inquired, looking so much like his usual debonair and polished self that Will found the idea of this dare even more exciting.

“You have to take all of your clothes off,” Will informed him, shocking himself with his audacity, the sexy rasp in his own voice, the way his Southern accent had crept back in, layering the words with a musical lilt. “And run outside, all around the front yard, where anyone could see. Then come back in like nothing happened, put your pajamas back on, and we’ll continue.”

“Are you going to watch?” Hannibal asked, giving him that *look* again, like he was scolding Will, warning him that he was going to snap any minute and fuck Will until he screamed.

“Do you want me to watch?” Will batted his eyelashes, a small smile tweaking his lips.

“I’ll leave that up to you,” Hannibal informed him, standing up and removing his robe, folding it neatly on the bed. “Really, this is an easy dare. I must admit to being something of an exhibitionist.” He began unbuttoning his shirt, remarking conversationally, “If you had asked me my sexual fantasy, it would have involved making love outdoors, in plain sight of any passers-by.”

Will gasped, heard himself gasp, felt himself sweaty, feverish, perplexed, almost delirious, slightly worried he might be drooling. He looked at Hannibal, standing there with his shirt off, and let his eyes drift down from the older man’s expectant smile to the soft thicket of hair on his beautiful pectorals, then his trim waist and the soft curve of his low belly.

The word *Daddy* sprang into Will’s mind so quickly it took his breath away.

Hannibal grinned at him with the sexy fangs, did another shot, then peeled off his pants to reveal he liked to go commando -- Will averted his eyes with a sigh as he caught a fleeting eyeful of Hannibal’s firm, shapely ass while the doctor sprinted gamely out of the room, as if he went outside naked on a daily basis, just as a fun hobby.

Will decided to stay exactly where he was, holding onto the elegant little couch for dear life with his heart pounding uncontrollably. He'd already pushed things much further and faster than he felt ready to deal with.

He heard the front door click open and spent a couple of minutes trying to make contact with his intellect and common sense, only to find they had been knocked unconscious by his lust and curiosity and nervousness.

Hannibal came jogging happily back into the room, and Will kept his eyes carefully, sharply focused only on the older man's face, flushed with the chill of the fall night, his cheeks attractively pink, mouth caught up in a sweet, adorable grin.

"Thank you, Will, that was very refreshing," Hannibal enthused, walking towards the bed, and by extension, Will, who remained frozen in place on the couch. "If you are looking, please keep in mind that it is cold outside."

How could he be so fucking casual about this? Will's internal screaming got louder, because Hannibal's easy confidence only turned him on more. He laughed, "I wasn't looking," then bit his lip painfully.

"I do so enjoy the thrill of a little danger, don't you, Will?" Hannibal inquired, slipping back into his pajamas.

He sat back down next to Will as the younger man chortled, "Safe danger is fun."

"Danger can be fun whether or not it's safe," Hannibal replied, calm but all of a sudden serious. He reached out to caress Will's flaming cheek, his fingers pleasantly cold on the feverish skin. "But you will always be safe with me."

"Do you feel safe with me?" Will asked as Hannibal traced his cheek with the back of his knuckles, then dragged the gentle touch down his stubbled jaw, so that the soft bristles of hair brushed Hannibal's fingers.

Hannibal's eyelashes fluttered, as if he was taking in the sensation of touching Will and it was tantalizing. "No."

"What...what do you mean?" Will asked, moving slightly closer out of instinct, awkwardly bumping into the tray between them.

Hannibal lowered his hand and cleared his throat. "Nothing of consequence," he said by way of recovery. Will got the distinct impression he hadn't meant to say "no" in that open, vulnerable way, and now he was a bit embarrassed and overwhelmed. He wanted to hug Hannibal, tell him it was okay, and he knew that would make him feel okay, too.

He opened his mouth to say something, hopefully something that would make hugging the next logical step, but Hannibal spoke first: "Shall we turn in? I'm quite tired now."

"Sure," Will shrugged, getting whiplash from the twist and turn of their desires and worries and buried secrets.

He didn't want to push Hannibal when the older man seemed so mysteriously anxious, and anyway, there was always the chance he was misinterpreting all of this, basing it on his own feelings, mistaking them for Hannibal's. Maybe Hannibal meant he felt unsafe because Will was crazy and dreamed about killing people; after all, if that was the case, Will couldn't blame him. Being rejected for his instability was nothing new, but it would be an especially crushing experience if it happened with Hannibal. Perhaps the smart thing to do was get ready so he wasn't too surprised when the rejection fell, like a hammer.

They brushed their teeth, Hannibal gifting Will with a toothbrush which he tried not to attach meaning to. Then it was obviously time for bed, so he resigned himself to slinking away while Hannibal got *safely* back to his usual routine.

"Where are you going?" Hannibal inquired as Will started to leave the room with a murmured "Goodnight."

"To sleep on the couch?" Will answered, crooking his thumb towards the bedroom door to indicate, *down there, in the friend zone*.

Hannibal, who had already gotten into bed and under the covers, looked genuinely shocked that Will assumed he would be sleeping on the couch. "That's completely unnecessary, Will. Please."

He turned down the other side of the beautiful, plush teal blanket and patted the mattress. "There's plenty of room. I would never allow you to sleep on a *couch.* If you are uncomfortable sharing a bed with me, I will go downstairs myself."

Will almost scrambled into bed. His heart felt warm and wonderful. "Thank you." He sank into a pillow that was marshmallow-soft, his body in the silk pj's nestling into equally satiny sheets that made him stifle a fresh moan.

They lay on their sides facing each other for a few moments before Will said, meeting Hannibal's inquisitive gaze with nervous curiosity, "This has been one of the best days of my life. I really can't imagine why you would go to all this trouble over me--"

Hannibal reached out and placed his hand over Will's lips, giving him a stern head shake. "You really can't imagine, Will?"

Will trembled, afraid to move, afraid to breathe, although his breath pooled hotly into Hannibal's warm palm all the same. Hannibal drew his hand away with an indulgent smile.

"I…" He mumbled, then laughed. "I guess all I mean is thank you."

"It's been a wonderful day for me as well." Hannibal nuzzled more into his pillow, getting comfy, and it was so domestic and endearing. "Goodnight, Will."

Will felt almost perfect. He wasn't drunk, just a little buzzed, with a floating sensation. The only thing that could have made it better was a goodnight kiss, but as he closed his eyes, he decided that it was better not to risk one and possibly ruin this friendship, which was definitely the best thing in his life.

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“Will?” A deep voice was saying, somewhere very far away where Will couldn’t possibly reach. He was drowning in blood, every orifice of his body flooded with it as he plummeted deeper and deeper into an endless abyss, and he was drowning and falling at the same time. Above him, he saw the stagman, reaching a long, sharp-nailed hand down to save him, but he couldn’t will his limbs to move, so he kept falling while blood poured down on him like a suffocating waterfall--

“*Will.*” Hannibal gently shook his shoulders, and Will blinked his eyes open, then squinted into the shadows. “I’m sorry, I wouldn’t have woken you, but you were thrashing and I was concerned for your safety.”

“I was...thrashing?” Will realized it was true; the muscles in his arms and legs ached from exertion. His skin was slick with sweat, hair matted to his brow with it. “Sorry.”

“Quite alright. Let me get you a glass of water.” Tossing the sheets off, Hannibal stood, glancing back at Will as he added, “And perhaps a towel.”

Will sighed, “Thank you,” feeling completely embarrassed, for God’s sake, couldn’t he get through one night without another of these painful, harrowing dreams leaving him a sweaty, quaking mess? It didn’t exactly make him look like great relationship material.

He undid his soaking wet shirt, peeled it off his hot skin and folded it hurriedly, putting it on the nightstand.

Hannibal was quiet and composed when he came back, almost unreadable. Interesting, how he would open and close himself to Will depending on how comfortable he felt at any given moment.

Will took the water gratefully and sipped at it while Hannibal rounded the bed and got back in, looking at him discerningly. “I want to ask you something, and I’d like a completely honest answer, as I truly believe it to be for your own good.”

With a shaky laugh, Will answered, “I’m an open book right now, Doctor.”

Hannibal gave him a small, serious smile. “Would you feel better about going back to sleep if I hold you? Before you answer, know that I do not want you to come into my arms to try and please me, and nor do I wish you to say ‘no’ if you need to be held. That would upset me more than any other outcome.”

“I...need to be held,” Will admitted shyly, “I’d like for you to hold me.”

Hannibal lay down on his back and Will came to him, conscious and worried about the fact that he was so sweaty and couldn’t stop trembling. Sometimes, after a nightmare, it could take a half hour or more before the shaking stopped. The whole experience made him feel gross, and like a freak, even if he had fantasized occasionally about what it would be like to be soothed by a loving partner after one of the awful fever dreams.

Will hesitated, but Hannibal guided him so that he nestled in beside the older man, one arm around his middle and his face flush to the doctor's chest.

"Breathe, Will," Hannibal murmured, hugging him not too tightly, just enough so Will felt protected.

Hannibal felt amazing, warm, strong and safe, with a steady, reassuring heartbeat under Will's ear. He buried his face more into the older man's chest with a rough sigh and breathed in the scent of black orchids and spice emanating from his body.

"You're alright, Will," said Hannibal softly and slowly, repeatedly, "You're alright. There, now."

Will rubbed his cheek against Hannibal's chest through the silky fabric of his pajamas, and Hannibal murmured his approval, "Good boy. Yes, that's nice, isn't it? That's my good boy."

The words made Will feel so unbelievably good that he moaned and sank deeper into the sensation of Hannibal's fingertips massaging over his bare back, so gently, tracing light circles over his damp skin. Hannibal had his nose buried in Will's sweaty curls, breathing him in deeply. *Daddy,* Will thought, holding him with a needy insistence, tight and close, throwing a leg over him and letting himself go back to sleep.

Hannibal made no objection; in fact, he seemed content to exist as Will's personal teddy bear. And Will was so, so very tired, too much so to analyze what this meant or if it was a good idea. It felt fantastic not to think for once, just to feel, to soak in the intimacy without a care for consequence.

Thank you, Daddy, Will thought right before he slipped under again, tugged into a dark and dreamless slumber, and from his contented sigh, low in his throat, Will could have sworn somehow Hannibal had heard him.

Chapter End Notes

So...Hannibal's not the only one with a crush! 😉 Thanks for reading -- more soon!

What I Need

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal's alarm clock beeped at 6am and they both made quiet, plaintive sounds of objection. Slowly, Will realized where he was and that he'd shifted during sleep so that he was even more directly on top of Hannibal, sealed to the older man's body like glue. With a small twinge of embarrassment, he laughed, climbing off and returning to his own side of the bed as Hannibal reached out to the nightstand and tapped the off button on the alarm.

"Too early," Will mumbled, and Hannibal said, "I concur" in a sweet, drowsy, delicious sort of way that made Will's stubbornly clamped-shut eyes flutter open.

Hannibal was smiling over at him as if Will was the most amazing thing he'd ever woken up to. In consequence, all of a sudden, Will was wide awake, his heart pummeling his chest, fingers aching to reach out and touch again, pull his friend close, even...his lips tingled as his eyes dipped to Hannibal's hazy golden gaze. Yes, wouldn't that be nice?

"So, about last night...thanks for being there for me," Will began. His voice was sleep rough, as it always was the morning after one of his harrowing night terrors.

"My pleasure," Hannibal said, flipping onto his side. He slid his hand under the pillow to slightly prop his face and looked directly at Will, *so yeah,* Will thought in a low grade panic, *no pressure!*

"I know that things are changing between us," Will ventured cautiously.

"To say the least." Hannibal reached over with one finger and trailed it down Will's bare bicep, and Will felt freshly aware that he'd spent the night half-naked and clutched to his therapist like an especially co-dependent spider monkey.

Will shuddered in pleasure at Hannibal's touch, which was always just *so* good, always just exactly what he needed, whether soft or firm. "Uh, I know we should probably talk about that."

Hannibal's eyes slid from Will's face down his neck and chest, then back up to his lips and eyes, taking each part of Will in like a different marvel to behold in a stunning work of art. "It does probably warrant a discussion. If you like."

"If I like?" Will raised his eyebrows. "Did you have another idea of how to resolve this?"

"I did," said Hannibal, shifting closer, putting his hand on Will's nape and massaging him there, keeping that sultry eye contact until Will realized his usual morning hard-on was a lot more urgent than usual, *fuck*, what this man did to him.

“Oh, ummm, not that I don’t want...it’s just that...okay, I think we can agree that...Jesus, why can’t I put this into words?”

“Take your time, Will.” Hannibal went on touching him, caressing his cheek, stroking his jaw, running soothing fingers through his damp curls. “If you’d like me to stop, by the way, simply say so and I will, immediately.”

“No, that’s actually the whole problem,” Will explained with a wry smile. “I don’t want you to stop, but I’m worried about our friendship, I don’t want to risk it...also, you’re the first man I’ve ever…” He pressed his lips together, frustrated over not knowing the right way to say these essential things that had to be placed honestly between them if they were going to move forward.

“I understand, that must be very overwhelming for you. I can’t imagine your touch-starved, anxious state, and your natural sensitivity are making the experience any easier.” Hannibal went on smiling at him with perfect patience, so Will nodded.

“Yeah. Every time you touch me, it feels so good that it almost hurts. And I really don’t even know what it’s like, being with a guy…” Will laughed, barely covering a moan at Hannibal’s caresses.

“An understandable cause for nervousness,” Hannibal acknowledged, still repeating the comforting cycle of physical gestures towards Will, caressing, stroking, centering him but setting his skin on fire at the same time...it was so incredibly confusing and oversensitizing. “What if we were to become more physically intimate, and you did not like the way it felt? You think you might lose me, in that eventuality?”

“I’d understand if you didn’t want to be friends anymore after something like that.” Will nodded again, chewing his lip.

Hannibal traced his upper lip, then the bumps of his teeth sinking into the lower one, then along the bottom of Will’s lower lip, and Will eased up on the biting, releasing a long breath.

“If you heed my advice about anything, Will, please do so in regard to holding yourself in higher esteem, and requiring others to do the same. You are worth much more than any one facet of our relationship. I would never want you absent from my life, whether or not you wished our relationship to become sexual, whether or not we tried it and found that it did not work out. You are precious, and whether as friend or lover, I could never be content to lose you.”

“Okay,” Will concluded, feeling fragile, intimidated by the kindness and genuine caring in Hannibal’s words. “Okay, I think I need some time to think about it. I’m just too *fraught* right now, and I don’t want to freak out and push you away.”

“Of course. I’m not going anywhere, Will. Do you understand?”

Will looked up at him, at the way Hannibal’s hair was sleep-mussed, the soft crinkles by his soulful eyes, the luscious shape of his lips. *Did* he understand why someone like Hannibal would even want someone like him? Did he understand the kind of affection that could be

that patient and non judgmental and giving? Truthfully, it confused him more than anything, but somehow he wanted it just as much.

He was about to answer “Yes,” and it stood to reason Hannibal would have offered to make a typically elaborate breakfast afterwards, and they might have shared a pleasant, quiet morning together before they both had to go to work. But then Will’s cell phone buzzed rudely from its place on the bedside table. Will groaned and snatched it up almost violently, like an accusation.

Hannibal sat up and folded his hands in his lap, the sheets neatly covering his long legs. Will sat up beside him, blushing anew at the way his friend was still wearing his full pajama set, while he was stripped to the waist, although -- another reason to blush -- he knew for a fact that Hannibal wasn’t about to complain about all the skin he was showing off.

Part of him wanted to kick the sheets down, let Hannibal see his throbbing erection and decide what to do about it, but before Will could allow that fantasy to develop any further, he had to answer this damn inconvenient phone. “Yeah?” he barked.

“Well, good morning to you, too,” Jack greeted him with trademark sarcasm. “Listen, we’ve had a body drop in Baltimore. 57 Phoenix Ave, can you be here within a couple hours?”

“Uh, I can be there faster than that,” Will remarked without thinking about the implications of the statement.

“What’s happened, Will?” Hannibal murmured, looking at him in concern.

Will realized his free hand was trembling slightly over the sheets, and that he really dreaded the idea of upending this tranquil start to the day by making himself delve back into the darkness of another murder scene.

“Is that Dr. Lecter?” Jack inquired, revealing that he had near superhuman hearing abilities. “Bring him along, too, we can always use his insight. They called us in on this one because the body was displayed, something like a tableau, but it doesn't smell like the Ripper to me, not gruesome enough. Still, we need to be sure.”

“See you in 30,” Will said blankly, very much aware that his work life and personal life were tightly entangled, an untenable situation.

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They had time for a quick shower each, and then some toast and coffee while Hannibal complained that Jack Crawford’s spur of the moment demands on Will’s time meant that the profiler couldn’t linger to eat “a real breakfast.”

“This *is* a real breakfast, by my standards,” Will noted, chasing his last bite of toast with a swig of the incredibly delicious coffee which Hannibal had prepared with his french press. Even that process had been an unnecessary waste of their time, but he was pretty sure Hannibal would have been even more annoyed with the rush if he suggested they go through the Dunkin Donuts drive-thru on the way to the crime scene.

“If you were mine, my dear, you would eat a full, proper breakfast each and every morning,” Hannibal said firmly, making Will’s jaw drop. “You would sit here with me at the table, relax and prepare to begin your day with the energy required to take it on, and you would remain in your seat until I excused you.”

A long pause followed, during which time Hannibal finished his own coffee, refusing to hurry even though Will had eaten with the sort of careless speed he usually did at home. Will stared at him, almost forgetting that someone had been -- probably brutally -- murdered the night before, and it was up to him to make sure justice was done. Almost forgetting he was Special Agent Will Graham, the fragile teacup up on Jack Crawford’s highest shelf in the china cabinet, the one depended upon to shine with all his useful eccentricity and save the day, no matter what it did to him. For a moment, he was almost Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter’s boyfriend, and he might not know if he was ready for it to be true, but he knew he liked the idea of it *a lot.*

He cleared his throat. “I’ll think about it.”

“You do that.” Hannibal looked at him, somehow stern and tender all at once.

Distracted, torn uncomfortably between work and play, Will glanced at the time on his phone and realized they were still going to be nearly as late as they would have been if he was driving from Wolf Trap. “Shit, we’ve gotta get a move on.”

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On the drive over to Phoenix Ave., they hit rush hour traffic, which wasn’t even that big of a deal, since it was a short drive and they were well on their way, despite the occasional stop-and-start. But there was this absolute *bastard* tailgating Will, continually beeping at him and yelling at him to go faster when it wasn’t humanly possible to do so without hitting the car in front of him.

“God, what an asshole,” Will grumbled, his hands tightening on the steering wheel.

“I did offer to drive,” Hannibal reminded him, which was actually annoying because Will couldn’t keep letting his friend do everything for him like he was a goddamned child or something, right? He wasn’t *incapable,* just fucking tired and weirdly sick with some unknown malady that wrecked his sleep and made his head hurt nearly all the time, he could still go about his daily responsibilities…

The man in the car behind them laid on the horn again, and Will scowled. He looked over his shoulder at the guy’s obnoxiously aggressive face and yelled, “Hey, back off!”

“Jesus,” Will added under his breath. He could feel Hannibal watching him intently. “What?” He almost snapped at him.

“I love you,” Hannibal answered matter-of-factly.

His face was vulnerable with yearning and admiration, as if Will at his messiest and grumpiest was so utterly lovable that he could not help saying so.

Traffic moved forward again, and Will pressed the accelerator lightly, following the flow of cars with a sigh of relief. He couldn't actually believe what Hannibal had just said; his heart seemed to be way out ahead of him on the subject, hammering in his chest with incessant exhilaration, but this was not the time or the place for such a confession! He couldn't *deal* with this right now; God, was this maybe-relationship even going to be possible with all the other complications in his life?

"That wasn't the right moment," Hannibal admitted a bit ruefully. He was looking out the window now, holding himself with his stiffest elegance. "I'm sorry, Will."

"Don't be," Will said, too gruffly, but he meant it.

"Hey." He took Hannibal's hand for a moment with a warm squeeze, and the older man relaxed slightly, meeting Will's soft gaze until he had to look at the road again.

"Please don't be sorry, I'm not," he added gently, wishing the day was over, that he could fast forward through the painful necessity of the work to the part where they could be alone again, with plenty of time to talk about whatever they wanted to.

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"Why do you look like you've just seen a ghost?" Jack said by way of greeting when they arrived at a big, pristine Colonial house in a classy neighborhood.

The autumn leaves were drifting lazily from two big trees by the sides of the house, and the scene was haunting in its deceptive serenity, since Will knew what was waiting for him inside.

Hannibal, who was half-concerned that Will's wan expression had something to do with his confession of love, shot Jack a disapproving look. "Good morning to you, too, Jack."

"It's not a good one," Jack answered, although he gave Hannibal a respectful nod of greeting.

"This is getting harder for me, Jack," Will admitted, fiddling with his glasses. "Every time I go into one of these places, I don't know how I'm going to pull myself back out of what I see."

Jack handed him a pair of blue latex gloves. "I know it's hard. But I need you here; this *family,* who just lost a wife and mother, they need you. Now if you're walking away, you need to do that and tell me. You can't be halfway involved in this job, Will."

Will's jaw tightened and Hannibal's protective instincts roared inside him like a lion. "I know that. Tell me what we're dealing with." He followed Jack inside while Hannibal trailed them, quietly greeting the rest of the forensics team as they all surveyed the grisly view in the family's otherwise lovely living room.

"Carol Fitzgibbons, 43, she was supposed to be alone in the house all night. Husband and Uncle took the two sons on a trip to Six Flags." Jack provided the information in his usual,

coldly clinical voice, although none of them missed the sadness in his eyes and the determination in his bearing.

“A trip without the Mom?” Will asked, almost innocently. He stared at the tall brunette woman, who was strung up by the ceiling fan, her body dangling out of joint, a thick cable wrapped around her neck. Various cords and cables from electronic devices were tied all over her, around each of her arms and legs, snaked around her waist.

“Mom supposedly had to work,” Zeller elaborated, snapping a few photos from different angles while Katz and Price took samples of evidence strewn around the room, bagging each small bit of ephemera that might hold a clue.

“Yeah, Mom was having an affair,” Will revealed, as if it was obvious.

He sighed, a gorgeous vision in the flannel and khakis which Hannibal had lovingly washed for him and had ready for him to put back on again in the morning. The therapist hoped that soon, in addition to keeping plenty of clothes at his house, Will would also cede the choice over his daily attire completely over to Hannibal’s preference. Perhaps now was not the time to be drifting into fantasies of their future domestic contentment, so he kept his face trained in a serious expression of focus, as if he disapproved of this killer’s rather creative and intriguing display.

“How can you tell?” Beverly asked, her brow furrowed as she straightened from a crouching position where she had been collecting fibers from someone’s sweater.

“Look at what she’s wearing,” Will suggested, nodding at the woman’s stylish dress, which clung attractively to her lithe figure. A pair of black pumps lay on the floor under her blue-tinged, sheer tight-clad feet, and the blue in her lips merged with a remnant of plum lipstick.

“She looks pretty fancy for an all-nighter at the office,” Jimmy observed crisply.

“Mmhmm, okay, come on everyone, give the man some room,” Jack encouraged, directing his other team members to exit the space so that Will could “do his thing,” like the one-trick-pony he was so often treated as.

Will nodded mechanically, looking like he was about to disintegrate, and Beverly pursed her lips in concern, shooting Hannibal a questioning look as if to silently ask if Will should really be doing this. Hannibal frowned, feeling the frustration of helplessness since if he intervened, Will would surely be greatly annoyed with him and see it as a disrespect of his independent choices. His guidance of Will always required delicacy and never more so than when the profiler was immersed in a case, his anxiety spiking as a result.

Once outside, Jack muttered to Hannibal, “You’re awfully quiet this morning. No observations on the crime scene, Dr. Lecter?”

“Only to note that it is a crime of passion, which is entirely in line with Will’s theories,” Hannibal shrugged. “A jealous husband, perhaps back early from the vacation, or he never went. Perhaps the uncle took the children on their trip while the husband lingered to investigate his wife’s extramarital activities, making some excuse to his brother, or even

including him in the scheme as a means of establishing alibi. It does not appear to be the work of the Chesapeake Ripper."

To say the least. While passably entertaining, the scene in the Fitzgibbons' house had been far below his own standards.

"Crime of passion, and the Chesapeake Ripper?" Jack chortled grimly. "Those two ideas don't seem to match. The Ripper never struck me as a man of passion."

Hannibal decided that Jack knew as much about what made him tick as he knew about the food he was served at Hannibal's dinner table, which was good news, as he certainly wasn't going to find himself a suspect anytime soon on Jack's account.

"But Mr. Fitzgibbons may be a creature of unmanageable passion, and fiery jealousy."

"Perhaps," Jack acknowledged. "We've sent agents out to confirm the husband's whereabouts." He glanced at the house, clearly impatient for Will to reemerge with his analysis of the killer's design. Easily picking up on the aggressively negative energy roiling from Hannibal's mood, he added, "What else has you on edge, Doctor?"

"The way you are treating Will," Hannibal replied coolly, "With such carelessness for his well-being. You pressure him into doing work that's slowly pushing him towards a breakdown, playing on his conscience to get what you want from him."

"Yeah, maybe so," Jack nodded, "Maybe so."

They watched as Zeller, Katz and Price carried the boxes of evidence out to their vehicles and prepared to head back to Quantico.

"I haven't asked yet why you and Will Graham were together at 6:30 in the morning," Jack continued, with a nearly snide note in his tone of which Hannibal thoroughly disapproved. "And you're carpooling now, too, huh? Interesting."

"Interesting, perhaps, but also none of your business." Hannibal smiled at him poisonously, and Jack smiled back, still his friend, but also distinctly critical.

"Maybe before you start in with your saintly speeches to me about abusing Will Graham's mind, you ought to ask yourself how far *you've* been going to get what you want out of him," Jack advised.

"Jack, let me advise you to keep your opinions about my relationship with Will Graham to yourself. That is, if you value our friendship and your own association with Will." Hannibal answered, with not one change to his calm expression, although he would dearly love to slice Jack's throat and watch him bleed out all over the lawn.

He did not at all appreciate the fact that Jack's words had some validity, touching on an unexpected, irritating thrum of guilt nagging his...was that his *conscience*, smarting as though slapped? How appalling.

Jack laughed with a deceptive warmth which Hannibal saw right through. He clapped the therapist on the shoulder and answered sharply, “It’s a good thing we *are* such good friends, Hannibal. Because otherwise, I might think that sounded very subtly like a threat. And I might have even more questions about what’s going on with you and my best agent.”

“Then it’s a good thing we’re friends,” Hannibal answered blithely, simmering with murderous temptations within.

With every day that passed, he grew more impatient with this state of affairs, Will trapped in purgatory doing work he hated for a supervisor who pushed him too far. It was little wonder the profiler never got to slow down long enough to ask what he really wanted from life, but if Hannibal had anything to do with it, that was about to change.

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“Whether it was the husband or a lover, someone killed this woman out of a fierce jealousy,” Will reported from his usual spot at the very back of the forensics lab at Quantico.

Carol Fitzgibbons was laid out on a cot in the middle of the room while the team busily analyzed the evidence.

Beverly nodded, examining the phone charger cord tightly knotted around the woman’s upper arm. “The cords and cables feel like an accusation.”

“She was always on her damn phone or her tablet, texting, messaging, he never knew with whom but he *festered* with suspicion and rage, the sense of being a cuckold, humiliated by her.” Will’s voice had taken on an angry quality that made Katz, Zeller and Price glance at him as if mildly afraid. “It was time for others to see what kind of woman she *really* was.”

It was so fucking tiresome, this old song and dance -- Will, unable to help “becoming” the killer when he visualized their design, and his normal, mentally stable colleagues finding him frightening as a result. Even Beverly, who really cared about him, who was a good friend, would probably always keep her distance to some extent because Will looked like a ticking time bomb, no matter how well-meaning -- one day he might explode.

He was exhausted with having people look at him like a curiosity or a burgeoning menace, even as he allowed himself to be eaten alive by his terrifying thoughts all in aid of justice. It didn’t seem fair, but then what did? Falling for his best friend who also happened to be his therapist, at this unbelievably stressful time in his life, when he couldn’t seem to get a grip on his emotions? Hannibal deserved better.

“Well, if it *was* the husband, I'm surprised he didn’t kill her lover, too,” Beverly resumed, and Zeller looked up from his microscope, his blue eyes bright with curiosity.

“Huh. What if she wasn’t even having an affair, but the husband was just that paranoid?”

“We’ll be going through her phone records and emails all afternoon,” Price put in, holding up a ziplock bag containing the woman’s iPhone. “So I guess we’ll find out soon enough. Guilty lovers always leave a clue.”

“Passion is too inundating an ordeal to be fully hidden,” Will mused, taking on Carol’s point of view, sequing from the killer’s perspective to the victim’s with eerie fluidity.

Beverly shrugged off her lab coat, hung it on her chair, and peeled her gloves from her hands. “Hey, Will. Want to come with me to pick up some coffee and sandwiches? We’re going to be working on this for a while.”

“Yeah, let me grab my coat,” he muttered, grabbing his army green jacket from the hook by the door. He slipped a hand into his coat pocket, noticing a new weight, surprised to find his fingers closing around something smooth, hard and metallic.

“Oh, come on,” Will laughed, shocking the others with the sunny, happy sound, the way the stress melted from his face and his eyes shone in merriment. In the palm of his hand was one of the most expensive Rolexes he’d looked at with Hannibal in the store yesterday. The doctor must have snuck it into his coat pocket sometime this morning, and Will had been too distracted to notice until now.

Still chuckling quietly, he murmured, “I can’t believe it.”

He couldn’t seem to stop smiling; his cheeks ached with the unaccustomed feeling as he put on the watch, because he might as well wear it, right? It belonged to him now.

“Whoa, that’s a gorgeous watch,” Beverly said, buttoning her leather jacket and flipping her long, dark hair over her shoulders. “Where the hell did you get that?”

“It’s a long story,” Will sighed. “Come on, let’s go get lunch.”

***

On the walk over to the campus deli shop, Will told Beverly about his confusing, unforgettable day and night with Hannibal. “You know," she said, "I’m not even much of a romantic, but *that* is a romantic story. It’s like something out of a movie. What are you going to do about it?”

“What *can* I do about it?” Will shrugged. As he paid for the sandwiches and coffees, he couldn’t help admiring the way the light glinted off the fancy watch. It seemed like Hannibal was here with him now, encouraging and complimenting him, making his heart skip a beat. It wasn't about the watch, it was the thrill of what the watch represented. He felt *marked*, delectably so, as if Hannibal had left huge, shining purple hickeys all over his neck.

They made their way back to the lab, Will carrying the tray of coffees while Beverly took the bag of sandwiches. Leaves crunched under their feet as they strolled across campus, brash young FBI recruits walking purposefully around them. The air was crisp, just short of bracing, and Will had a sense of new beginning, the sort of feeling he’d heard people associating with the coming of autumn, but which he’d always dismissed cynically as wishful thinking.

“He’s my psychiatrist, unofficially, but still. I mean, we’ve had a lot of sessions, he knows about all my deepest insecurities and struggles. *And* he’s my friend. That’s a crazy enough

combination without throwing sex into the mix, isn't it?"

"Right, but when it's that intense, you know the sex is gonna be, too," Beverly smirked.

Will blushed and held the door open for her, then followed her back to the lab, still undecided in his romantic quandary. "What about the whole sugar daddy thing? It's a bit much. I'm too old to be anyone's baby, right?"

"I think it's cute," Beverly shrugged. "Plus, not only is he five hundred percent into you, but he's completely whipped, and you're not even officially dating yet."

"Who?" Zeller asked, looking up from his work when they came back into the lab. "Dr. Lecter?"

"How did you know who we were talking about?" Will asked.

"Finally!" Zeller crowed, "Pay up." He thrust his hand out to Price, who rolled his eyes and slipped him a few rolled up bills.

"Listen," Price added in all his wisdom as Beverly and Will set the food and drink down and everyone gathered by the break table to dig in for a standing lunch. "I may be out thirty bucks, but I still say if you're hesitating, don't. You and Dr. Lecter just have that whole *vibe* going on, you know? That doesn't come along every day."

"Vibe?" Will asked, raising his eyebrows. He pulled the lid off his coffee and blew on it, feeling dubious. Surely the connection between himself and Hannibal, which Will himself hadn't recognized until yesterday, couldn't be *that* obvious to everyone else, even people he didn't expect to care that much?

"Oh, yeah. You two are like peas and carrots," Zeller noted, unwrapping his sandwich. "You've been attached at the hip since the day you met."

"Got any more metaphors left in your arsenal?" Beverly quipped drily.

"Shut up," Zeller snarked. "The point is, you and Lecter speak each other's weird, geeky language."

"You're both sort of...subtly creepy," Price elaborated with a lavish gesture of his hands.

Will looked at him, annoyed.

"Oh, in a good way," said Price by way of recovery while Zeller nodded too enthusiastically, "Yeah, in a helpful, productive way."

"Thanks a lot," Will answered wryly. "I think I'm all set on the unsolicited advice for now, where are those phone records?"

"You can get started on that file," Beverly nodded to a folder on a nearby table. "That's all the calls and texts from the last month. I'll start on the emails."

“I think being whipped is overrated,” Zeller resumed, stealing a chip from Price’s bag, causing Jimmy to mock-slap his wrist.

“No you don’t,” Price smirked, winking at him.

“No I don’t,” Brian replied, eyes twinkling as he smiled and stole another chip.

“Wait a minute,” Will said under his breath to Beverly, “Are those two…?”

“You mean you never realized?” Beverly laughed, sitting down across from him and flipping the folder open. “People are gay, Will.”

“Yes,” Will sighed, pulling his gaze from the Rolex on his wrist and placing it more appropriately on the page in front of him. He uncapped a highlighter and prepared to get to work referencing numbers and names. “So I’ve noticed.”

***

Will got home around eight, worn out from a full day’s investigation. They’d pinpointed Carol’s probable lover from the phone records and spent the rest of the day interrogating him, as well as the husband and brother. Witnessing all of their grief was horrible, even though at least one of them was probably faking it -- maybe that was the most depressing part. All he knew was he needed to relax and unwind because this day felt dirty on his skin, thick with the grit of despair.

The watch caught his eye as he rolled his sleeves up to fix the dogs’ dinner. Buster had come in to investigate when the chow would be ready, and Will laughed when the little dog gave him a short, questioning bark.

“Shh, I’m on it, Buster. Give me a minute.” He glanced further into the living room, where the other dogs more politely sat on their pillows, transparently expectant. “That goes for the rest of you, too,” he smiled, taking a bit of comfort from their cute habits and reassuring presence in his life.

Once the dogs were joyfully eating, Will distractedly heated himself up some leftovers from the meatloaf he’d made the other night. He sat at his lonely little table, picking at the food. Then, finally, he let himself think about what he’d been *wanting* to ruminate on all day into the evening, repeatedly cutting the thoughts off when they threatened to get too damn immersive, preventing him from getting his work done.

He thought about Hannibal, about how Hannibal was giving him space, not texting or calling since they parted ways that morning. Will knew he had *asked* for time to think about their changing relationship, but all he could think about was the way Hannibal had stared at him when he said *”I love you,”*, like a man who had wandered the desert for so long he assumed that the happiness he beheld must be a mirage. The words had scared Hannibal, yet he hadn’t held back.

The only thing Will wanted right then was to make Hannibal smile. He wanted to make Hannibal happy, the way the therapist kept making him. So he did something heretofore

absolutely unheard of; he picked up his phone and took a grinning selfie, holding up his wrist where the new weight of the watch encircled him in shiny, exorbitant splendor.

"It looks perfect," Hannibal texted back almost immediately. Will laughed with nervous delight at this show of his power, that Hannibal had clearly been waiting on bated breath to hear from him again. *"It would look even better with your new suit, if I were to take you out to dinner tomorrow night.*

Will tapped out a quick reply: "*I'd like that. But I don't really want to wait that long to see you again."* A brave admission, not the sort of thing he usually let himself do. He kept getting bolder, and it felt too amazing to stop.

"*You must be tired from your day,*" Hannibal sent, and Will could sense the concern even from the simple words on his screen. It was as if Hannibal's presence, the thoughtful, insightful rumble of his voice, was always with him now, but never close enough.

"*Yeah, but I'm hesitating to ask you to drive an hour and a half just because I'm feeling a little needy.*" A joke, although perhaps the real humor could be found in what an understatement it contained. Will Graham, a *little* needy? Hannibal had no idea, but if Will fell any further, he would know soon enough.

"*I'm already in my car,*" Hannibal answered. "*I'll see you soon.*"

Will was bright-eyed and rosy-cheeked, grinning from ear to ear as the dogs stared at him, not used to seeing him act this way, in an infatuated near-stupor, an idiotic, silly daze. Even his headache from the long work day and the lingering discomfort of his elevated body heat seemed to lessen slightly as his mood turned from dour to ecstatic at a dizzying rate. All it took was admitting to himself what he wanted, then asking for it.

He sent back a reply, wondering when he'd become such a sentimental sap, but suspecting there was no turning back now. "*Not soon enough.*"

Chapter End Notes

Please forgive me non-canonically shifting the season of this Season 1 period from winter to fall...clearly my subconscious thought it should project the whole September mood I'm in onto the fic before I realized I'd done it 😂

Anyway, hope you enjoyed and more soon...I'm not going to give any hints because I can't without spoilers 😄

xx

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The dogs barked when they heard a car pull into the drive, and Will jumped up from the chair where he'd been nursing a glass of whiskey. Shamelessly, he nearly ran to the door like a kid on Christmas morning, shushing the dogs when Hannibal came inside and they all wanted to jump up on him (he couldn't blame them, as it was a highly relatable instinct).

Hannibal looked a bit surprised at Will's enthusiasm; he blushed at the intense look in his eyes. How remarkable, that Will could do this to him, Hannibal in his impeccable coat with his flawless suit beneath, his glass-cut features and normally cold, above-it-all composure. Now he was open, gorgeously so.

Will pulled him into a hug before either had said a word, and they stood there just inside the door, Hannibal holding him firmly, Will nuzzling into his neck.

"You're cold," Will chuckled, his laughter tickling Hannibal's skin, making the older man sigh and hold him tighter, sinking a hand into his curls and inhaling him deeply. Hannibal's skin and coat felt chilly from the brisk night air, and he *smelled* like always, completely amazing, making Will irrationally want to bathe in that manly, mysterious scent, just lose himself.

"Not anymore," Hannibal murmured, gliding his hand down Will's back over the younger man's sweater, letting his fingers fall tentatively to Will's hip, as if he wanted to grip harder, but held back.

"I'm like a human space heater," Will smirked.

"How are you?" Hannibal asked, bypassing Will's attempt to poke fun at his feverish state.

"Better now. Thank you for coming over."

"Will…" Hannibal laughed, softly and even nervously, drawing Will up, cupping his face and sighing again. "I would very much like to kiss you."

Will's heart raced; he looked into Hannibal's face and saw a supplication and a request all at once: *let me make it even better for you. Let Daddy make it all better, sweet boy.* He craved the words he felt, but he was too shy to make any requests for specific pet names or affirmations. Perhaps they didn't need words when the feelings between them seemed so wonderfully blatant and mutual. He'd been bold enough to get Hannibal to come here; maybe Hannibal could help him with the next steps.

"Okay," Will said, and his voice sounded breathy to his own ears, more so than he had intended; as if he was overripe on the vine, bursting to be plucked and feasted upon. His tone made desire burn hot in Hannibal's gaze, sending a shiver down Will's spine.

“Can we...can you go slowly at first, and be gentle?” he asked, timid, embarrassed at needing to ask. Intimidated, as usual, by the strength of his desires and the fear of rejection; he’d been down that road too many times not to be gun shy when he wanted someone this much.

Hannibal caressed his cheek, rubbing his thumb thoughtfully over the pink, over-warm skin. “Of course, my dear.”

He took off his coat and Will hung it up, trembling, feeling like he should be feeling silly and awkward, when all he could really focus on was an all-consuming craving for this damn kiss, like it was his first kiss, like he had no idea what a kiss even was, or as though they were about to invent the kiss for the first time in history.

Will took Hannibal’s hand and led him to the bed. There wasn’t really another place to get comfortable, as all he had in the living room by way of other furniture was two separate chairs.

“I can’t believe we’re doing this,” he admitted, and Hannibal smiled.

“I can.” He clasped Will’s face tenderly, his thumb coming up to trace the shape of his ear, setting off more pleasurable tingles; Will was so sensitive, he pictured himself again as the juicy fruit simply exploding if Hannibal touched him just so in exactly the right places.

Will put a hand on Hannibal’s knee, massaging as they both leaned in closer, then Hannibal pressed a petal-soft kiss to his lips, almost innocent and pure, like friends. Will got a brief taste of mint and heat, and an immediate desire for more, like getting to have just one bite of chocolate cake: he wanted to gorge himself.

“How was that?” Hannibal asked intently.

“Different,” Will reflected. He licked his lips, staring at Hannibal’s, realizing he was trembling harder, “Do it again?”

Hannibal kissed him with a bit more pressure, more lingering warmth. He kissed the corners of Will’s lips, then teased him with three sweet kisses full on the mouth that almost crossed the line between careful and passionate. Will moaned and opened to him, daring to flick his tongue experimentally across the seam of his friend’s lips.

“*Will.*” Hannibal licked gently past Will’s lips, stroking his tongue slowly against Will’s, making the younger man’s stomach somersault, and it was happening again, but worse than ever, the embarrassing overabundance of Will’s sexual yearning. He cried out softly, as if wounded, clinging to Hannibal’s shirtfront, and Hannibal’s hand gripped his shoulder tightly, pulling at his sweater, tugging the fabric in a small pang of repressed need to match Will’s own.

“It’s okay,” Will said, running curious fingers from Hannibal’s throat up to his nape, “You can kiss me the way you want to now, I’m ready.”

“It’s okay to need more than you’ve ever been taught you can have,” Hannibal answered huskily. He kissed each of Will’s blushing cheeks, then got a hand in his hair and tugged,

gently at first.

Sealing his mouth over Will's, Hannibal kissed him hotter and harder, but so skillfully, Will was completely blown away. He couldn't tell anymore where the spicy-sweet aftertaste of whiskey on his own tongue blended into the minty heat of Hannibal's, couldn't imagine a world past Hannibal kissing him, anything beyond it that would matter. The older man's mouth was hot and slick, not delicate or hesitant, but *knowing,* knowing just how to play with Will and drive him blissfully wild.

Hannibal playfully bit, then sucked Will's lower lip, and the noise Will let out caused the doctor to pull his hair more sharply. "Do you remember what you called me last night?"

"Oh, Jesus…" Will squeezed his eyes shut and Hannibal pressed their foreheads together; they stayed like that a few moments, Will cupping Hannibal's face and neck, Hannibal slipping a hand under Will's sweater and henley to graze his bare stomach, feeling the sharp intake of his breath.

"I said that out loud?" Will lamented, and Hannibal laughed musically.

"Don't be afraid of me, or of what I make you feel. It made me so happy to hear you call me that. I need it too, Will. I need you." Hannibal's accent had gone especially thick and smoky, going to Will's head like two more glasses of whiskey. The world seemed to sway; his fantasies merged with reality and the impossible thrill of it made Will gasp.

He was lost, afraid to say it, needing to say it. "Daddy," he whispered.

"Good boy," Hannibal praised, and the words went right to Will's cock. He sighed as pleasure shimmered through him. "I want to kiss your neck, thoroughly."

Will was so turned on, he started to pull his grey sweater over his head before Hannibal was halfway done with the sentence. Hannibal chuckled softly and caught his arms to stop him. "Ask me nicely, if you want it, darling."

"Please, Daddy," Will begged, his hair riotous from being pulled, curls spilling haphazardly over his brow as his eyes gleamed with confused, elated tears, afraid to believe he could want this *and* have it. "Kiss my neck."

Hannibal helped him tug the sweater over his head and then mischievously tossed it across the room. Winston let out an inquisitive whine while the other dogs jostled slightly. Will made a click-click noise at them that made them quiet down and sink back into their pillows to go to sleep.

Then Hannibal looked at Will with his thin ivy green henley leaving his neck fully exposed, at the longing in his eyes and then the telltale bulge in his jeans. He traced Will's ear again, as if transfixed by the same feature that had caused Will to feel self-conscious about his appearance since childhood. "Beautiful," Hannibal murmured, and kissed his earlobe, then nibbled at it.

Will's breath caught and he bit his lip, stifling a louder moan. "Don't hold yourself back from me, darling boy. I want to hear you."

Will held onto Hannibal's shoulders and nodded, using trust to keep himself from running away from where he most desperately longed to be.

Pleased, Hannibal kissed Will's forehead, intoning softly, "Beautiful," kissing his cheeks and then his hands, fingers and palms.

Will let the hapless, keening sounds cascade from his lips without further attempt to silence his needy vocalizations. Hannibal didn't know, the way former lovers had made comments about his noisiness, how one had even mocked him for it so that he felt thoroughly ashamed and resolved to keep as quiet as possible in future sexual encounters, even though this ran counter to what his body seemed designed to make him do.

"Beautiful," Hannibal repeated, this time in response to Will's moans. He guided Will to lay back on the bed, seeming so polished in his brown plaid suit, looming over Will, but the apparent facade of his smooth manner evaporated when he pressed his lips to Will's neck and let out a low moan of his own. "Oh, Will."

Hannibal lay beside Will and began placing soft, small kisses all along his jawline, trailing them more wetly down his throat, then grazing the pulse with his teeth. He hadn't even sunk his teeth in, but something made Hannibal go slightly feral; he made that pained sort of noise again and snaked a hand under Will's shirt, roving up to cup a pectoral before he whispered, "Yes?"

"Yes, Daddy," Will sighed. Every new place Hannibal touched him felt *perfect.*

"Can you take this off?" He tugged at Hannibal's suit jacket, learning the cutely awkward negotiation process of undressing a man, and Hannibal removed it accordingly. Then he was kissing Will's neck again, one hand still roaming through his curls, toying with them, then tugging, one hand planted on his chest, the older man's pinky finger barely grazing over one peaked nipple.

"Oh," Will said, his fingers digging into Hannibal's back through his waistcoat. The slippery glide of the expensive, smooth fabric was its own kind of naughty delight, but at the same time he wanted it gone so he could feel Hannibal bare against him. Once again, he was going too fast, letting his libido carry him away. He had only been briefly concerned that being with a man was going to be too different for him to enjoy; now that he felt Hannibal's kisses, all such doubts were far behind him, difficult even to recall the source of. "Ohhh…"

Hannibal nibbled again, up and down his neck, very soft nips that made a slowly building thrum of pleasure culminate in Will, thickening his cock even more so that it strained against his jeans.

"Hannibal?"

"Mmm?" Hannibal breathed hotly against him, and the shiver of that breath against the skin he'd left wet with kisses made Will quiver.

“Hannibal, I should warn you,” Will persisted, and the older man looked up at him with flushed cheeks, his mouth swollen and moist, much too kissable. “It’s just...I have a hard time holding myself back, once I get going…”

Hannibal raised his pale brows, a curious smile tweaking his plush lips. “Oh?”

“Yeah, I...have a…” He looked away, over at the plain dresser, which was all that was in his eye-line from this angle. “I have a very high sex drive. I’m, um…”

Hannibal used one finger to tip Will’s face back to him. In Will’s fever-addled, bewildered state, his head bobbed easily back to the doctor’s demanding but loving gaze. “Tell me more, Will.”

“I’m horny all the time,” Will admitted, turning crimson. “Um, whenever I’ve gone to bed with someone, they’ve told me I’m too much. Insatiable. Too loud. Too sensitive.”

“Perfect, beautiful, irresistible boy,” Hannibal sighed, “That is nothing to be ashamed of. I wouldn’t have you any other way. You are an absolute dream as far as I am concerned.”

“*You’re* beautiful,” Will answered, breathless. “I want you so much. How could I not have realized until yesterday? I think I’ve wanted you all along.”

“I’ve wanted this from the first moment I saw you,” Hannibal admitted, biting Will’s neck a bit harder, still restraining himself, to the extent Will could feel the tension of how he was holding himself back, sizzling in the air between them, tightening Hannibal’s muscles.

Will writhed beneath him, seeking friction automatically for his urgent erection, moaning when Hannibal pinned his wrists to the bed.

Hannibal asked him softly, “Do you often masturbate?”

“At least twice every day,” Will confessed, “I...I can’t help myself, especially lately.”

“Insatiable,” Hannibal smiled approvingly. “But you haven’t orgasmed today.”

“No,” Will whispered. “No, Daddy.”

“Why do you like to call me that, my pretty baby?”

“Because I like you in control of me. Because I want you to take care of me. I know I’m a lot, I can be hard to deal with, my emotions and thoughts are wild and scattered, afraid of themselves. I’m socially awkward and stubborn and set in my ways, which are kind of weird--”

“I knew exactly what I was letting myself in for when I fell in love with you,” Hannibal assured him. “I love you, not in spite of your uniqueness, but because of it. You, my love, hold an allure which no other has ever wielded where I am concerned. Normally, the idea of emotional intimacy is wholly unappealing to me, something to be avoided at all costs.”

“And now?” Will asked, searching his sunset amber eyes.

“Now I feel there’s no turning back. Do you understand?”

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Will said yes, and to some extent Hannibal did think he understood the immensity of this bond that kept deepening between them, so that soon they might feel more like one person than two, repeating that dance of theirs for as long as life let them. Yet he knew enough of his own nature, and of Will’s, to know this love could easily be the death of one or both of them, so for him, the words “there is no turning back” held a heavy, irreparable meaning, like striking a knife deep into the skin knowing it would scar, yet ready to cherish the pain and the reminder of it for all time.

“Something else,” Will said, “I think you’re incredible. You know that?”

“I know how difficult it is for you to share your emotions,” Hannibal answered, gliding a hand down Will’s neck, longing to grip it tightly, not sure whether he would be willing to let go.

How rapturous it would be, to watch the life fading from Will’s brilliant sapphire eyes as he burnt up for the last time in a surge of deadly pleasure. But what life would there be for Hannibal, after that? Somehow, his affection for this man had robbed him of his impish enjoyment of inflicting murderous mayhem as a sadistic form of pleasure, if only where Will was concerned. He wanted the only pain he gave Will to be of the healing variety, but this left him in new and dangerous territory. He had no recourse for this passion, only the very knife’s edge of audacious vulnerability, where angels fear to tread.

“I know it’s not easy for you either,” Will said, placing his hand on top of Hannibal’s on his throat, pressing the older man’s fingers tighter for a moment. Just a moment to savor the way the pressure on Will’s neck, lightly inhibiting his breathing, gave them a fleeting jolt of bliss, Will in being controlled and having his chaotic mindset narrowed down to a single point of focus; Hannibal, in exerting his power, taking the satisfaction of knowing himself to be *in* control.

“You’re still restraining yourself, Doctor,” Will said when Hannibal released him, sliding his hand down to Will’s fast-beating heart, as if fascinated by the way it made him feel to go much slower than usual, and slower than his own desires would dictate.

If it was up to Hannibal, Will would have already been stripped naked for a decadent hard spanking and fucking, but even in that, he knew his wretched tenderness would have found a way through; there was nothing his hands could bestow upon Will that would not come from love, pure and simple.

“You asked me to,” Hannibal smiled. “Now that we’ve come this far, the last thing I want to do is push you too hard and overwhelm you to the extent you no longer want this.”

“But you’re so good at pushing me, Daddy,” Will teased.

He drew Hannibal more fully on top of him and caged him between his thighs, and Hannibal could easily discern this was what Will had “warned” him about, his overflowing libido, a

quality which only made Hannibal fall deeper in love. The idea that Will's thirst for their joining could equal his own was endlessly exciting. Never had he imagined, previous to setting eyes on this impetuous, stunning boy, that he would meet his true, equal partner in every way, even including bloodlust and the call of the hunt.

"It's not fair for anyone to look, nor sound, nor act as you do, you petulant, provocative boy," Hannibal accused fondly. He took in the sight of Will like this, with his henley shoved up to his shoulders, baring his sexy torso and hard nipples, his curls twisting every which way, his long lashes batting coquettishly, and almost felt the situation was beyond his ability to tolerate without the afore-thought-of very hard and long fucking. But Will, in spite of his exceptional skill at making Hannibal wild for him, was in his own way a blushing virgin; he needed special care, and Hannibal intended to give it to him.

"What is it that you want from me, sweet one?" he asked indulgently, thinking that in spite of his misgivings, he would likely grant anything this lovely boy requested.

"Show me something," Will asked, unbuttoning Hannibal's waistcoat, dropping it to the floor, then loosening his tie. He stroked the fine silk fabric of the tie, so clearly infatuated with anything that was a part of Hannibal, down to his elegant attire. "Teach me something, Daddy. Go slow, but show me how you really feel."

"Here is what I propose," Hannibal said throatily, "I will show you part of what I consider the art of love, and in exchange, you will touch and kiss one part of me you have never had contact with before. I leave the choice of the latter up to you, as you must leave the former to my discretion. I promise to meet your terms, especially since I would cherish the opportunity to savor you while drawing out your pleasure to a nearly intolerable breaking point."

Will whined, wrapping his arms and legs tight around Hannibal, kissing him hotly, a fever kiss full of pained ecstasy, sloppy and deep. "You can't talk to me like that, I'm going to burst."

"Not yet," Hannibal smiled as they drew back from each other. Analytically, he considered Will's needs and his own before deciding on the next course of action. "I'd like to see you in absolutely nothing, except for your new watch, and my tie."

Will shivered, blushed deeper, and laughed. "Really?"

"Take your clothes off," Hannibal ordered, tender and stern the way Will liked him best, the way he'd noticed Will craving him to act. Giving him structure, giving him a safe place to sort out his messy feelings, giving him the discipline he craved, all laced through with love and understanding. He wouldn't get this from anyone else; he couldn't, and the thought increased Hannibal's confidence (he never would have admitted it, but between his nearly unmanageable erotic fervor for Will and his still-new shock at the power of his affection for the boy, he otherwise might have continued rather nervously in the encounter), along with his excitement.

Will fumbled so many times in the act, adorably self-conscious, trying to laugh it off. He peeled off the already manhandled henley, then slid his socks off using his toes before unbuttoning his jeans. When he unbuttoned and unzipped them, each small action making

Hannibal tense with lust, he moaned helplessly, carefully sliding the jeans down to reveal the impressive bulge standing out in his plain grey boxer briefs. Hannibal took one look at his shapely thighs and felt his mouth water for deep biting. He watched as Will slowly hooked his fingers into the sides of his underwear and eased them down as well, then kicked them to the floor. Will's cock was as gorgeous and perfect as the rest of him, and Hannibal growled at the sight of all of him, drinking him in like the only sustenance that could maintain his joy.

Then Will slipped Hannibal's tie from around his collar and placed it around his own neck, neatly cording it. He was breathing heavily, cheeks like shining apples, lips open on his breathy sighs, caught between the imposing fever sweetness of the encephalitis and his honest, deepening lust for Hannibal. And he was unquestionably the most beautiful sight the killer's eyes had ever beheld.

Will stretched his arms over his head, clinging to the bars of the headboard. In the lamp glow and the otherwise quiet of the night, he looked luscious for the taking; the white gold of the Rolex on his wrist suited his pale skin to exquisite effect, while the shining navy on the clock face brought out the same shade in his eyes, which were big and needy on his therapist. The sophisticated necktie encircled his gorgeous throat, a naughty finishing touch to further mark the boy as his very own.

Hannibal climbed atop him again, where it felt nature had designed him to be. Careful not to let all of his weight press into Will, he controlled it so that he was weighing his lover down only enough to make him feel secure. Will wrapped his arms around Hannibal's neck, meeting his hungry kisses with reciprocated ardor, and then Hannibal's lips wandered lower, kissing much more roughly on Will's neck, then his chest. He couldn't possibly help lingering on the boy's arms, biting softly into the hard curves of muscle already streaked in delectable sweat. He licked the slick lines of perspiration and Will gasped at his excesses, with little idea how much further they could take him.

"I'm sorry, I...can't stop shaking," Will sighed, and the lower down on his body Hannibal stroked his big hands and kissed or nibbled at him, the harder he trembled.

"Perfectly natural," Hannibal murmured, entranced. He caressed Will's thighs as more anticipatory pleasure swept his body, stiffening his erection to an almost painful alertness. How far could he take Will tonight?

He wanted Will's shamelessness, the very same naughty greed that the boy had been so embarrassed to tell him about. He wanted Will desperate, taken to extremes, tense, loud, shaking and crying for more even as overstimulation made him grit his pretty teeth.

"Do you want my hand, or my mouth?" He asked, smiling with sweet mischief up at Will, highly suspecting the effect this question would have on the needy boy.

"Both," Will grunted, his hips bucking when Hannibal stroked a finger down one of the lovely bones, covered in soft, tender flesh simply begging for his mouth. "Both, please, please--"

Hannibal nuzzled his face into the dip inside Will's hip bone, flicking his tongue, softly broad and slow, and Will moaned, his hand shooting down to his own cock, unable to take the

prolonged arousal any longer. Perfect, he was at his limit, ready to be pushed further.

With loving firmness, he caught Will's hand and placed it aside. "I said *my* hand, Will."

Will ran his fingers shakily through Hannibal's hair. "I'm sorry, Daddy. It's too long for me to wait, I told you how I am. I'm greedy, too greedy."

"Too beautiful," Hannibal corrected him, squeezing his thighs, then gently gripping his cock for a quick, light stroke from base to tip. Will's hips arched off the bed again and his toes dug into the sheets; he clung to the pillow, nearly frantic and barely managing to conceal it.

"Fuck," he blurted, fever-blurred and hectic, "Hannibal. Daddy, please."

"Good boy." Hannibal stroked him again, using the plentiful precum at the tip to lubricate the glide. "Look how responsive you are to Daddy's touch. You were made to be touched by me, weren't you, my dear? And how nicely you beg."

"J-jesus, please." Will pouted, squeezing his eyes shut as his fingers closed tighter on their handful of Hannibal's smooth silver-tossed hair. "Please. Your *mouth*."

Still smoothing his hands over Will's thighs, he sank his mouth down over that delectable, thick length, salty and slick with precum and now his own generous saliva. His lack of further preamble had the intended impact as Will immediately mewled, his hand going slack in Hannibal's hair. Helplessly, he thrust his hips, driving deeper into Hannibal's mouth, and the sensation of Will's girthy cock filling his tight mouth, sinking almost to his throat gave the older man an ecstatic thrill.

"Ahh! Oh, that's so good, feels so good," Will cried out, and Hannibal held his hips, fucking his slick, eager mouth down on Will's rigid length over and over as his enthusiasm made Will grow wilder in response, grabbing his own hair and Hannibal's, tweaking his own nipples -- his hands wandered restlessly, unable to do anything to even out the fast, tense build of pleasure inside him.

"No, I'm close, I'm sorry," he panted, and Hannibal released him with an audible, wet *pop*, taking a few delightedly ragged breaths. "I didn't want to finish so fast, but if you keep doing that, I'll…" Will licked his lips, his shyness trying to break through his delirium. Somehow he was still worried about Hannibal's comfort and preferences. "I'll come right in your mouth and I don't know if you want…"

"Will, I want that," Hannibal assured him. A sweetly awful feeling seized his heart in a vice grip, a suffocating love. He almost could have cried at the idea of Will actually thinking that this act, which brought him such complete joy, was some kind of imposition or unearned privilege. And although the time would come to edge Will past endurance, right now he could not deny him the release he so desperately needed when he was this tenderly vulnerable and close. "I want every part of you," he added. "Give yourself to me."

"Yes," Will sighed, collapsing back on the bed, "Yes, yes…"

He was so acutely sensitive and close that Hannibal almost thought a mere breath from his lips would have sent him over the edge; but Hannibal wanted Will deep inside him again, would accept nothing less than every drop of his precious release, wanted it hard and rough.

“What else do I need to hear, Will?”

“Daddy, please put your mouth on me again, Daddy, I need you,” Will panted, and Hannibal smiled his approval.

He licked around Will’s tip, lapping up fresh precum as Will shivered and bit his lip, anxious fingers trailing his own stomach, circling his nipples. His eyes were closed again, and Hannibal murmured, “Look at me, Will. See how it looks, for us to be together like this, *see*.”

Will’s heavenly blue eyes fluttered open and he took in the sight of his own cock plunging deep into Hannibal’s mouth, the way the doctor watched him intently with pleasure-glazed cinnamon eyes, how his lush lips wrapped around Will’s hot flesh and claimed it repeatedly, humming and moaning approval and bliss at his taste, heat and weight.

“So good -- we look amazing together,” Will got out on halting breaths. His breaths got even shorter, tighter, more desperate -- Hannibal took him as deeply as possible with a happy choking noise, and Will cried out his name, coming in thick spurts all over Hannibal’s tongue.

Hannibal let some of the cum drip from the sides of his mouth, he wanted Will to see how he enjoyed him, how he licked it delicately and then rose back up to share the naughty taste in a raunchy, filthy kiss.

“Oh,” Will moaned at his first taste of semen, at the intensity of Hannibal. Did he sense that this was only a small hint at Hannibal's fierceness over him, how brutal he would be if he let himself go completely? Will wasn’t ready for that yet, but he took what Hannibal gave him, already far more than either of them had planned for tonight, and beyond what he had ever experienced of sex in the past in terms of intimacy.

“Oh, kiss me,” Will moaned again and again, by now only half-awake, slowly drowning in pleasure, sinking under the heavy black waves of his illness combining with the orgasm and Hannibal’s commanding influence, a sickly, obsessive way to ride out the aftershocks.

“My darling,” Hannibal soothed, watching intently as Will fell under, hypnotized by erotic delight, defeated in his arms as surely as he himself was defeated, his heart resting heavy in the sweaty, twitching hand laid out on the bed.

He kissed Will’s forehead, then checked his pulse, determining the boy was not in an overly dangerous way. Still something nagged at him, and he couldn’t tell if it was the previously estranged voice of his conscience which only seemed to care about Will, or the lingering dread of how close they were becoming when he had no assurance Will would ever accept the completely seen version of him in all his ghastly, hedonistic, blood-streaked essence.

Fears for himself and fears for Will were growing so indistinguishable that he lay awake for quite some time in confusion. He watched Will’s ragged sleep and the darting of his eyes

beneath shuddering lids, the rise and fall of his quick breaths slowly evening, felt his clammy forehead, loosened and removed his tie from the boy's gorgeous neck. He unclasped the Rolex and placed it on the nightstand, then set both of their phones to silent. Will might resent the choice in the morning, but Hannibal would not have him waking again until his body was naturally ready to end the nightly repose.

Sick boys shouldn't even be going into work, he caught himself thinking in a near husbandly flash of protective disdain, projected towards the FBI and Jack Crawford but not quite fully excusing his own hand in Will's continued ailment. A shame, that the boy blossomed so brilliantly in the grip of a fever which also could progress to take his life if unchecked. A revelation, that Will was so beautiful in pain, but much more so when pain and pleasure intermingled.

His feelings were roughly tangled, thorny vines digging into his heart, a baffling squeeze and slice combining adoration and fascination with inconvenient compassion and guilt. With a discontented sigh, he undressed, neatly laying his suit over a chair by Will's humble kitchen table (everything here, every little homey detail, gave him unwanted doses of affection that only led to more of that slowly burning, bewildering guilt). He paced the room in his underwear, gradually realizing that although he'd found no release for his own immensely excited state earlier, he didn't have the heart to give it to himself now.

Finally, he climbed into bed beside Will. The boy had turned onto his side, tangling the sheets between his pretty legs as more sweat ensured he'd kicked off the blanket Hannibal had covered him with when he was shivering. Frowning, Hannibal spooned behind him and placed a protective arm around him, sliding his legs behind Will's, feeling so wonderful like this, but unable to relish the moment of their closeness because of the way they had come to it. He never stopped thinking about it, this struggle between his heart and mind, as night melted into a new dawn. Without him realizing, his mind collapsed into slumber like a light shutting off, finding no peace in the process.

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He woke a few hours later to the feeling of the mattress dipping as Will climbed into bed. Through drowsy, slowly opening eyes, he saw his beautiful boy returning to him in t-shirt and jeans, and realized Will had awakened first even without the alarm, and had allowed Hannibal to go on sleeping while he let the dogs out and fed them. Will hummed with pure contentment and wrapped his arms around Hannibal, who lay on his back, feeling almost paralyzed with joy at the sensation of Will's open-hearted affection, how pleased he was that Hannibal was there.

"I didn't get to do my part last night," Will murmured, meeting Hannibal's amazed expression with a big smile. "I'm supposed to touch and kiss one part of you I never have before, right?"

Rendered almost speechless by Will's adorable behavior and the way it rendered him hard, trembling with need for the offered affection, Hannibal nodded. "Yes."

His heartbeat tripped over itself as Will grinned and ran tentative, exploring fingers over his chest, traipsing over skin hot with desire, feeling the curves of his pectorals dusted in

scratchy-soft silvery hair. “Will,” he gasped, his cock bulging rigidly in the tight confines of his underwear.

He wondered suddenly if he wasn’t just as ravenous and needy as Will, addicted to the heady impact of this boy’s reciprocal attraction.

“Feels good?” Will purred. “I want to kiss you, Daddy.”

Hannibal ran his fingers through Will’s curls, so soft, mildly damp with rain drizzle, and Will dipped his sweet face to kiss over his thundering heartbeat, nuzzling his nose through his chest hair, inhaling him with a delighted sigh. His softly chapped lips pressed gently at first, then grew more fervent.

Will moaned softly and flicked his tongue over Hannibal’s nipple, roving his finger over the other one as Hannibal’s hand clutched at his hair. “Will…” Will’s tongue became insistent, lapping at him suggestively, sending more waves of pleasure straight to his raging erection. Then he lightly bit and sucked, and Hannibal grabbed him tightly around the shoulders, “*Will*--please.”

“Can I kiss you in one more place, Daddy, please? As a treat?” Will smiled at him proudly, and Hannibal adored the way he was so amazed at his own boldness, learning more about his own power and how he thrived on being a good boy for Daddy.

“Yes, my darling,” Hannibal said hoarsely, his eyes rolling up as Will slinked down the bed, disappearing under the sheets.

Will nudged his face against the bulge in Hannibal’s underwear, rubbing his cheek gently against it, revelling in the older man’s throaty groans. He licked at the outline of Hannibal’s rigid cock through the silky boxers, and Hannibal’s breath caught.

When Will carefully pulled down his underwear and his erection sprang free, the younger man gasped. “I would have thought this was too soon, too fast for you,” Hannibal said.

Will kissed the tip and Hannibal thought he might actually faint. “It’s a part of you,” Will told him, experimenting with licking at his lover’s rock hard cock, enjoying Hannibal’s gritted-out gasps and sighs. “It’s beautiful, like everything else about you.”

Hannibal slipped the sheets down to Will’s shoulders to watch his face beginning to bob when he tried taking the older man into his mouth for the first time. “Wow,” Will marveled, pumping with his hand in between attempts at sucking, learning carefully by Hannibal’s reactions. “It’s strange being on the giving end of this, but I like it. Do you like it, Daddy?”

Hannibal shuddered and nodded, wrapped around Will’s finger so tightly it seemed to constrict his breathing. “Yes, baby.”

“You’re yummy,” Will praised, keeping that naughty-flirting tune in his voice, the teasing lilt of his Southern accent lavishing every syllable with pure sex. “I want to make you feel good.”

“Please, Will,” Hannibal grunted, “You’re driving me crazy.”

This confession, such as he had never granted another because it had never been true before, inspired Will to show even more enthusiasm in his somewhat sloppy but very committed licking and sucking. Hannibal couldn’t believe this was real, that Will tolerated the taste of his precum and the newness of his hard length sinking in and out of his precious, plush, beautiful lips, that Will learned so quickly how to suck his cheeks in and build up a rhythm. It took hardly any more of this to bring him off; he managed to blurt out, “Will, I’m close--” and instead of pulling his mouth off, Will simply sucked him harder and faster, taking all of Hannibal’s plentiful cum right into his mouth and then swallowing it, locking gazes with his lover while Hannibal trembled through his orgasm, repeating Will’s name in a ragged whisper. It was all he could do not to actually *whimper,* he’d come so hard, the bliss pouring through him, marrow-deep and unforgettably intense.

Will looked very pleased with himself, glowing with it actually, as he drew himself up to press a kiss to Hannibal’s mouth, still slack with amazement. “Good morning, Daddy,” he grinned.

“Good morning, baby,” Hannibal replied, breathing hard, staring at him, waiting for him to evaporate like the impossible vision of perfection he was, waiting for himself to ruin this somehow, crush it and break it, bleed it out just to prove his ego was more powerful than love, but then it didn’t happen -- he kept waiting and it kept not happening. How could it be? What would happen next?

He cupped Will’s face, looking for answers, finding a blissed-out boy, half-delirious with fever, skin too hot in his grasp, soft and slick with the sweet scrape of stubble and Will’s bright blue eyes, too bright, as if he could flicker into madness or worse at any moment.

“I used to think life was so mean and cold,” Will told him ecstatically, in a near-panic of joy. “Hannibal, I'm falling in love with you."

The words echoed through Hannibal's ears, reverberating in his heart. He held Will close and kissed him, stayed in bed as long as Will would allow before he began regretfully grumbling about work. They showered and dressed, Hannibal borrowing a set of Will's casual clothing, bewitched by the scent of his lover that lingered on the flannel collar, noticing that by now, the terrible aftershave was starting to smell *good* and it didn't even come as a surprise. What did come as a surprise was what he said over breakfast, after making them omelets with a much quieter attitude than usual, exchanging smiles with Will that carried deeper meaning than words. As they began eating, he considered what to do next, since he obviously wasn't satisfied allowing things to continue in this same vein, Will locked out from the truth, even the truth of himself, and Hannibal drowning in revelations he didn't know how to voice.

"This is nice," Will smiled, "I wish we could stay here all day and just be lazy. Too bad I've still got to wrap up that case."

“I think you should take today off, Will, but not for lazy reasons, as thoroughly nice as that sounds."

Will raised his eyebrows and put his fork down. "Why, then? It's not like we Special Consultants get a whole stack of paid leave days, you know."

"We both know your reasons for continuing to work for the FBI have almost nothing to do with money and everything to do with your sense of obligation. But you have to ask yourself how much good you can really do when you're procrastinating on finding out the source of serious symptoms."

"If I've been procrastinating, it's because I'm afraid. What if it's a tumor?" Will sighed. "I know it's not the most mature way of dealing with it, but I'm more than a little scared."

"I don't think you need to worry about anything like so severe a prognosis. I've been thinking about your sleepwalking and elevated temperature, the increasing headaches," Hannibal explained, fidgeting with his coffee cup as he carefully chose words to cloak the full truth while leading them to a choice he never expected, a choice to put Will's well-being ahead of his own need to keep his identity as the Ripper concealed. "I have a theory about the cause of your ailment, but to confirm it, I would very much like to take you to the hospital today, for a head scan. I believe you may be suffering from Anti-NMDA encephalitis."

Chapter End Notes

Will's watch: https://www.rolex.com/watches/submariner/m126619lb-0003.html

Under the blue

Jack nearly did a double-take when he walked into Will's hospital room. There was his prize agent, fast asleep and hooked up to IV's of fluids. Sitting next to him was Hannibal Lecter, also asleep and holding Will's hand. Abigail Hobbs stood by the window, looking pensively through it onto the light of a new day. She toyed restlessly with the scarf around her neck and chewed her lip, looking for a moment so much like Will that it completed the uncanny sense of family which confronted Jack when he saw the three of them like this.

"Ms. Hobbs," Jack murmured with a blase nod of greeting. He was still pretty sure the girl had a hand in her father's crimes, and she knew it; there was no need for false platitudes between them.

"Agent Crawford," she acknowledged, her voice as smooth as Hannibal's although her hands remained as fidgety as Will, now twisting the lid of a hospital coffee cup.

Elegance and ego, combined with an intense perceptiveness of the world around her that left her always on edge. She seemed to blend the personalities of her two surrogate fathers in a way that was mildly disturbing.

They stepped out into the hall, and she lingered because she knew better than to hastily excuse herself from conversing with the head of the FBI's Behavioral Science Unit. That would only draw more suspicion, the one thing he knew she was trying to avoid even as it clung to her like glue.

"What brings you here?" he inquired with that somewhat insincere friendliness thinly veiling his investigative intentions, a tact that was strangely charming despite its transparently manipulative style.

It had served him well over the years, and if recent events had done anything for his personality, he had mostly noticed himself getting even more distrustful of others, while at the same time ever hungrier for peace and justice, for the world to be reasonable and possess hope. Something good had to come through, prove that life wasn't just a whirlwind of misery, impending death and despair. Maybe if he could catch every ruthless killer who came his way, it meant there was hope for Bella, too. Hannibal called this line of thinking "desperate coping," and Jack had to admit the man had a point. But what else did Jack have left to keep him breathing, keep him useful, if Bella was fading?

"I needed to see Dr. Lecter," Abigail explained, running her fingertip over the coffee cup lid. Her ice blue gaze darted from Jack to the nurses and patients walking by, then back again.

"I asked his advice about the book Freddie Lounds wants to write about me, or wants me to write." She rolled her eyes and chuckled drily. "I'm not sure there's much of a difference as far as she's concerned."

"You wanted to see Dr. Lecter, and to do that you had to come here," Jack concluded.

“Oh, yeah, he’s been here with Will for three days; he hasn’t even left the hospital. Dr. Bloom came by with some clean clothes for him yesterday. She said that when she got here, Dr. Lecter was wearing a flannel shirt and sweatpants. I’m *not* making this up.”

“Interesting,” Jack mused. *More like infuriating.*

Well, that meant Hannibal had been wearing Will Graham’s clothes (since there was no possible way on God’s green earth Dr. Lecter owned such casual attire) and the doctor had been carrying on a bedside vigil for the ailing profiler. They were definitely having an affair; maybe they were even a couple. Maybe this had been going on from the beginning, and nobody told Jack a damn thing anymore. It brought up echoes of his hurt feelings about Bella concealing her cancer, but there were more confusing emotions mingled in his grief-addled mind.

Here he was, throwing himself into work harder than ever while he grieved for a wife who wasn’t dead yet, and two of his closest associates were rather obviously falling in love. New love, painful, uncertain and all-consuming; it was something Jack understood, had been remembering with haunting intensity since Bella finally told him why she’d been so withdrawn of late. Instead of being angry, as he damn well should be, for the therapist and profiler who had been unprofessional enough to become romantically involved despite the lines it crossed -- he almost lost his annoyance into empathy.

“You know, back in Minnesota, when you were hospitalized, Hannibal sat by your bed on one side, and Will on the other, giving you company and solace, waiting and hoping for you to wake up and be okay.” Jack remembered. “When I came in that room just now, I felt like I was seeing the same scene again, but with the roles switched around.”

“We’re not playing roles,” Abigail corrected him. Her youthful self-righteousness was really endearing in its own way, but he wasn’t going to get close enough to care. When it came to killers, he stayed detached; anything else would be foolish. “I guess we’re three people in a mess who found each other, and decided to stay in each others’ lives.”

He held his ground. “Right, well, whatever that bond is, and maybe it’s too complicated to explain to anyone outside it, it sure looks like the three of you are a family. But they’re not your fathers, Abigail.”

“Why is it so important to you that they’re not?” She frowned, tossed her coffee cup in the trash, twisted the fringe of her scarf around her fingers.

“Because I think you still need to deal with what your real father did. And if those two get any more protective about you, I may never know what really happened.”

“You may never know what really happened because nothing really happened,” Abigail retorted, “Except for what’s already been reported.”

Something happened. You happened. Jack smiled at her again with his cool condescension, impressed at how boldly she accepted his suspicions. Impeccable pride, just like Hannibal; clever but often unreadable, like Will. He was almost sure this girl was a killer, but hell if he knew how to prove it.

“I guess we’ll see about that.”

“Yeah, but you may not see me again, unless it’s on tv being interviewed about my book. Because I’m innocent, and whether it’s with Freddie Lounds or somebody else, I am going to tell my story.” Abigail glanced back towards Will’s room. “You should leave them alone, too. Let them rest.”

She strolled off like the Queen of Sheba and Jack chortled, thinking Freddie had been right to take one look at that girl and see a future celebrity. Abigail would be absolutely divine on talk shows detailing her tragic ordeals and how they had ultimately made her a strong, brave young woman, a survivor.

Not much he could do about her for now; eventually she’d slip up and he’d step in with a knowing smirk to enact deferred justice. But, for now: what about those two lovesick idiots in the room to his left?

Will should know better than to become personally entangled with his therapist, and Hannibal had outright betrayed Jack’s trust by crossing the line from professionalism to childish passion. He didn’t need his best profiler distracted and potentially compromised by a toxic relationship founded on an obviously unhealthy imbalance of power. He sighed and went back into Will’s room, feeling about five hundred and seven years old.

“Jack,” Hannibal murmured, roused this time by the click of the door opening. He looked from his hand, wrapped around Will’s, to Jack’s trademark smile of burgeoning impatience and disapproval. “I suppose you have your concerns about this.” Carefully detaching himself from Will’s sleepy grip, he followed Jack into the hall.

“This is borderline obnoxious, Dr. Lecter,” Jack complained. “You look for all the world like you’re actually in love with Will Graham. See, at first, I thought the two of you had just lost sight of your professionalism; I didn’t know you’d both lost your damn minds.”

“If you have a point, Jack, I really wish you’d get to it,” Hannibal requested, massaging the back of his neck, which must be stiff from sleeping upright in the chair by Will’s bed. He wore a more relaxed version of his usual attire: white shirt open at the collar, tan jacket unbuttoned, matching trousers slightly rumpled. His hair hung loose over his brow and there were circles under his eyes.

Jack was quietly seething, half due to frustration, half due to the effort of shutting off any potential sympathy he might feel for either of them. “So I guess I’m just going to keep waiting for an apology from you for sleeping with the man I asked you to help me keep sane and stable.”

Hannibal remained the same, tired and calm. “I regret that you’re disappointed with the outcome of introducing me to Will, but we both know life isn’t that cut and dry. If you’d met Bella under different circumstances, wherein it would have been considered inappropriate for you to be involved, would you have simply walked away from the love of your life?”

“Don’t bring my wife into this, Hannibal,” Jack warned.

“You know I have nothing but the utmost respect for you and Bella, for what you have together. Do you think Will and I don’t deserve it, because the way we came together fails to fit your preordained mold of normalcy? Perhaps our love makes Will *more* stable; perhaps we are both better, stronger, and sharper because of our influence on each other.”

“Right, who am I to judge, huh? We both know Will’s not in a stable enough place to be starting a serious relationship, you know that better than anyone.” Jack’s phone buzzed and he glanced down at it. Lab results from Beverly Katz; he needed to take this.

“This isn’t over,” he told Hannibal, “When Will’s awake and feeling better, the three of us are going to have a nice long talk about the future.”

“You are not Will’s keeper, nor judge and jury to the world at large, Jack.” Hannibal gave him a steely look, which Jack guessed might have intimidated a lot of other people, but he didn’t give a damn if Lecter was mad.

“And you’re not Romeo, Dr. Lecter,” Jack retorted, walking away. He tossed a last comment over his shoulder. “Call me when Juliet wakes up, will you?”

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“Hey, you,” Will said hazily, finding Hannibal back in his usual spot when he awakened. “Still here?”

Where else would I go?

Back inside himself? Away on some jaunt to an exotic locale to immerse himself in a murder spree, unable to enjoy any of it without his Will? Hannibal had never been so entrenched in one place, and the place was in his heart, in his memory palace where Will had taken up permanent residence.

“Hello, Will,” he smiled, caressing the younger man’s cheek, finding his skin had cooled slightly. “Your fever is coming down.”

“Who would have thought rest and fluids was all I needed?” Will quirked a smile. “I guess I was too intent on catastrophizing to realize it made more sense to give up and ask for help.”

“All will be well now, my darling,” said Hannibal softly. “Do you think you can eat something?”

“Hmm, whatever they send in is fine. Don’t go saying you’re leaving to make me some five star meal right now, okay?” Will squeezed his hand. “Wow, I did warn you I was needy,” he added with a chuckle, realizing he’d rambled into the tendency again.

“I’m staying right here. We can both tolerate a few hospital meals until you’re well enough for me to take you home.”

“I should check in with Alana, see how the dogs are,” Will nodded, looking for his cell phone, not finding it anywhere.

Instead, his eyes fell on an ornate bouquet of black and purple flowers from Hannibal, along with a few more modest offerings, including a gift shop floral arrangement from Katz, Zeller and Price, and a cheerful “Get Well Soon” balloon from Abigail.

“Has Jack been by?” he asked, his old obligations seeping in as he woke up more, sitting up against the thin pillows which Hannibal had fluffed as much as possible for him.

“The dogs are fine, Will,” Hannibal said with gentle sternness. “Jack stopped by to offer his well wishes for your speedy recovery. There’s nothing to worry about, I assure you. For now, we must focus on getting you better, and that means you’re going to have to accept the idea of relaxing a bit longer.”

“Kind of a new concept for me,” Will answered, fretfulness battling the temptation to give into Hannibal’s firm upper hand on the matter.

“You’ve shown a wonderful ability to adapt to new ideas and experiences lately,” Hannibal answered with a sparkle in his eyes and a huskiness in his tone that was only for Will.

“You flirt,” Will teased, reaching for him. “C’mere.”

Hannibal moved from the chair to the bed, positioning himself gingerly on the narrow mattress, careful not to disturb the IV. Will leaned up and kissed his mouth softly. His lips were dry, his eyes still tired, and he was beautiful, irresistible, so trusting it filled Hannibal’s heart with joy and possessiveness. “Did you order me that ridiculously expensive looking floral arrangement?”

“Do you like it?” Hannibal asked playfully, running his fingers through Will’s hair, cupping his nape.

“I love it. I love you. As soon as they’ll let me out of here, will you stay with me? I don’t care if it’s your house or mine, I just want you there.”

“I promise, Will, we’re together now.” Hannibal kissed his cheek and lavished him in an authoritative look of tender insistence. “You must eat, finish your regime of fluids, listen to the doctor’s advice, which will likely be to stop overextending yourself and continue your leave of absence from work for several weeks. Rest until you’re discharged, and then I will take you home. We’ll pick up the dogs, you can pack up whatever you’d like to bring, and stay at my house thereafter.”

“You’d really let my dogs into your house?” Will asked, astonished. “You do realize they drool and shed, and they smell like...dog.” He laughed nervously, and Hannibal saw through his insecure hesitance to believe this was what Hannibal really wanted.

“The dogs make you happy, and that is quite enough reason for me to accept them into my life as well. Surely I’ve proven to you by now that it brings me great pleasure to spoil you; how could I even resist such an opportunity to bring a smile to your face? I haven’t conquered my addiction to it while you were sleeping.”

Will hugged him and snuggled into him with a sigh. “Daddy,” he whispered. “My Daddy. Thank you.”

“Of course, my dear.” Hannibal dropped a kiss into his curls, rested his cheek against them and rubbed his back through the thin hospital gown that made Will look far too beautiful and sexy. “Now tell me, given our limited options, would you prefer a so-called ‘spaghetti bolognese’ or, although it occasions me a cringe to mention it, a ‘sloppy joe’?”

Will laughed. “Order for me, please.”

Hannibal grinned, flashing his fangs as he looked down at Will’s sleep-mussed, handsome face, cuddled so contentedly against him. “Bolognese it is.”

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They only had to subsist on watery tomato sauce over questionable ground meat and overcooked spaghetti for two more days before Will was released.

“I recommend an extended leave of absence from work; you’ve really been overtaxing yourself,” said Dr. Mayhew, a friendly woman who had acted as Will’s chief physician through his recovery. “Stay well-hydrated and keep resting; let Dr. Lecter coddle you for a few weeks.” She winked as Hannibal squeezed Will’s shoulder and the younger man blushed. “He’s good at it, and you deserve it. You’re a talented young man, Will, but you’re only human. Don’t let work demands wring you dry, okay?”

“Okay,” Will nodded, putting the finishing touches on his release paperwork. “Thanks, Doctor.”

“I’m not sure I like you calling anyone else but me ‘Doctor,’” Hannibal murmured into his ear as they left Will’s room and started for the elevator.

“What am I supposed to call all the other doctors in the world?” Will smirked, leaning on Hannibal’s arm, fully melted into his guidance and support.

“I didn’t say I had a solution in mind.” Hannibal merrily pushed the elevator button for “Lobby,” returning his lover’s mischievous smile. “It was only an observation.”

Once they were alone in the elevator, Will turned towards him more fully and toyed with his shirt collar. “I can call you Doctor all night in bed if you want, later.”

“Tempting,” Hannibal murmured into their inevitable kiss. He dropped the bag to the floor and backed Will to the wall as the elevator started sinking from the fifth floor to the first. Their lips collided several times with a hint of the hunger they’d had to hold back since arriving at the hospital, and for both of them the world seemed to have stopped for a few moments of dizzy delight. “I might prefer ‘Daddy,’ however.”

“Me, too.” Will squeezed his ass, blushing at his own boldness, and Hannibal was so happy.

The doors opened and as they started exiting the elevator, a doctor in a white jacket brushed by them, pausing after a moment as he recognized Hannibal. Placing his hand on the door to

hold it as several more passengers entered the elevator, the bearded man called, “Hannibal, is that you?”

Hannibal, standing several paces away, so close to the exit with Will by his side, took the luxury of a split second frown before his face shifted into a resplendent, friendly smile. “Donald, how are you?”

Dr. Sutcliffe strode forward and shook hands with his longtime colleague. “Always a pleasure.”

He noticed the tousle-haired young man currently regarding him with various shades of curiosity, suspicion, and jealousy, and then his eyes flickered to the duffle bag slung over Hannibal’s shoulder.

“And who’s this?” he asked with that oily manner which in this moment Hannibal found particularly annoying.

Donald Sutcliffe was the last person he wanted to run into when he was with Will. The man had amply witnessed Hannibal’s unconventional tendencies during their medical school days, and the two of them shared a few secrets regarding the unsavory experiments and risks they’d each taken with patients, to see what would happen.

“This is my--”

“Will Graham,” said Will hastily, in a flush of obvious irritation which made him look all the lovelier. Hannibal’s own anger abated slightly at the distracting realization that it was this easy to make Will jealous. “And you are?”

“This is Dr. Sutcliffe, Will,” Hannibal said warmly, in a good mood again now. It was worth this inconvenient encounter to see Will in this new light. “We studied together at John’s Hopkins, although ultimately he proved far more committed to the medical field than I. Still in neurology, Donald?”

“Yes, I’m specializing in recovery from brain trauma, and in tumor detection, it keeps me busy,” he said with a smarmy grin.

Will’s incisive gaze moved from Sutcliffe to Hannibal as his indignation morphed into confusion. It must seem odd that Hannibal wouldn’t have consulted an old friend and colleague who specialized in the same area of Will’s recent ailment. But it wasn't the first thing on Will's mind once they finally managed to extricate themselves from the uncomfortable coil of the man’s incessant small talk.

“Jesus, someone really ought to introduce that guy to Frederick Chilton,” Will mused as they made their way to Hannibal’s car. “I get the same vibe of invasive interest, like Dr. Sutcliffe is constantly on the lookout for some newly intriguing brain to crack open and pick apart.”

“An apt comparison,” Hannibal acknowledged, opening the passenger side door and helping Will into his seat. Rounding the Bentley, he got into the driver’s seat and started the engine,

shooting Will an intrigued look. “That is why I did not consult him about your illness or request he do your MRI.”

“You don’t trust him?” Will asked, looking pleased on the subject as he fastened his seatbelt.

Hannibal smiled, thinking that ironically, Dr. Sutcliffe’s untrustworthy, corrupt nature had once been the reason why they’d made decent friends, but he had no time for the man’s sleazy, opportunistic presence in his life these days.

“Certainly not. I’m also not interested in him romantically, and never have been.”

Will gaped at him in surprise and Hannibal chuckled fondly. “My dear, the expression on your face when Donald first approached us did not allow for misinterpretation.”

“Well, what am I supposed to think, when a good-looking, sophisticated fellow doctor comes up to you being so familiar and *touchy*?” Will asked, his cheeks taking on a scarlet tinge. “I was wondering…” He cleared his throat and Hannibal traipsed a finger down his neck, possibly more pleased with him than ever.

“I thought maybe he was an ex,” Will finished.

“And?” Hannibal asked, lifting his pale brows with transparently fake innocence.

“You’re the worst,” Will groaned, throwing his head back on the seat. “Okay, okay, I was jealous.”

“Why?” Hannibal insisted on knowing. He kissed Will’s neck above the collar of his flannel, letting out a low growl, in love with the warmth and smell of Will’s perfect body, *needing* to hear more about his possessive emotions.

“I want you to be mine,” Will sighed as Hannibal eschewed any worry for the fact that they were parked in broad daylight, in a public lot. The older man licked, bit, and sucked at his neck, and for every confession which Will offered, his mouth and wandering hands grew more daring.

“I don’t want anyone else looking at you like that, as if they have some claim on you-- God, Hannibal,” Will moaned, his glasses now crooked on his nose, his eyes closing while Hannibal’s hand moved from his knee up to his thigh with a rough grope.

He sucked harder on a bite mark which was going to lay purple and swollen on Will’s pale skin for days and then growled, “Tell me more.”

“I hated him for looking at you like that,” Will admitted, and Hannibal rewarded him by running his knuckles over the erection tenting Will’s jeans. “I hated him.”

Hannibal began to gently, teasingly stroke the hard outline of Will’s cock through the worn denim. “More, Will, tell me every detail.”

“For a minute I wanted to kill him,” Will blurted, and Hannibal’s eyes gleamed with affectionate pride. He gloried in the full reciprocation of Will’s love, and this progress, this

wonderful step forward in Will's understanding of his own murderous tendencies. He knew he must not overplay the moment, that Will would be sensitive about it.

"I want to fuck you right here, I want you in the backseat with your legs in the air, screaming for me to give you more, deeper, harder," Hannibal told him in a darkly needy tone, and it worked just as he needed it to. Will moaned and looked at him through dark lashes, his eyes full of equal desire.

"What are you doing to me?" Will asked, and Hannibal smiled indulgently.

"It's what I'm going to do to you when we get home that should concern you, my dear."

Take me in

“Alana said she would be over with the dogs in an hour,” Will said casually, slipping his phone back in his jacket pocket as Hannibal gave him a pointed look.

“I see.” Hannibal finished parking in front of Will’s house, seeming to require more effort to concentrate on the simple task than usual, as if perhaps most of the blood in his body had rushed away from his brain.

He exited the Bentley and smoothly opened Will’s door for him, offering a hand to assist him from the vehicle. “You know, Will, we really should be careful. You are still recovering, and slow and gentle may still be best.”

“You’re right,” Will smiled, “We should definitely take it easy. You don’t want to break me, after all.”

Hannibal nodded, and they both acclimated to the new decision during the few seconds it took to walk from the car to the porch. *Go slow, gentle, take it easy.* Surely this was manageable for two grown men with common sense, no matter what passion might be surging between them.

They’d been walking with their fingers loosely tangled, but then Will felt something collapse inside him, shake and shudder into lightening sharp heat and need. He couldn’t stop thinking about Dr. Sutcliffe with his eyes all over Hannibal, shaking his hand for a little too long, looking at Will as if he was some young, silly, non-threatening would-be interloper. He couldn’t get rid of the jealousy still roaring through him like a wildfire, burning down everything that wasn’t possessiveness and lust. Most of all, Hannibal’s words in response to Will's jealousy, how he would have *fucked* Will right there in public, and what he wanted to *do* to Will when they got home. Those words made him shameless, reckless, all the things they shouldn’t be at this delicate turning point in their lives.

Will didn’t know that he’d ever been truly reckless. He’d spent most of his life carefully resisting whenever the urge to be fully himself would whisper through his brain, tempting him with impossible surrenders to violence and lust. He looked at Hannibal’s pensive profile, the effortless elegance and strength of his body; he thought about the words and the jealousy and Hannibal’s devotion, the way it all made him *feel,* like plummeting down a waterfall without being allowed to scream. He wanted to let it all out out, scream, be as alive as he felt, full color beautiful madness, extravagant degrees of violent lust, things he’d never admitted he wanted.

”I wanted to kill Sutcliffe.” He remembered Hannibal, stroking him while he said those words in the car, aroused by Will’s darkness, instead of repulsed. Wanting more of Will’s secret, previously repressed world of bone-aching, remorseless brutality, unafraid -- or if he was afraid, fucking loving it.

“Hannibal,” Will said, finally, the two of them standing on the porch, the key in the door. He twisted the knob and shoved it open, laying his neediest blue gaze on his lover. He shook his

head slightly, a tiny movement no one else would have been able to read. A simple rejection of their mutual resolve to be careful and sensitive with each other.

Careful and sensitive were for other types of people, not who they were together, vibrations of the same ineffable melody riveting them to an understanding beyond words, too profanely sacred to be denied, incomparable. Will wanted them to tear each other apart, and he knew this feeling had been there, all along, buried under fever sweat and conscience, but he was so awake now; he was wide awake and flying, and he never wanted to come back down.

They collided in a messy, sinful outburst, kissing roughly, pulling impatiently at each other's clothes. Hannibal had Will pushed against the doorframe, one hand deep in his curls and tugging, the other wrenching Will's shirt open with a feral gasp, sending buttons flying. Will licked deeper into Hannibal's mouth, tasting every bit of him, the roof of his mouth, the hungry slide of his tongue, the sharpness of his teeth. He kissed so hard and relentlessly he could barely breathe, and he was certain this was the type of overexertion he'd been warned to avoid, but *Hannibal,* his flawlessly composed Dr. Lecter, was such a beautifully unhinged beast underneath it all, tasted so fucking good, *felt* like all the rage and power of heaven and hell.

Big hands roved all over him as they kept kissing, Will's lips sealed to Hannibal's, exploring and taking. Hannibal groped Will's ass, swearing against his lips in several languages, and Will tore his shirt open, too, then quickly undid his belt and hit his knees right in the doorway. He lived in the middle of nowhere, but anyone could still chance to see them, and the thrill was alight in him like a splash of kerosine feeding his already out of control inferno.

"Will," Hannibal moaned as Will bit into the softness of his low belly, "You're too beautiful, you're all I can see. You'll make a beast of me -- and we said --"

Will tugged his trousers down to his ankles and licked a stripe up his girthy erection, and Hannibal's hands planted themselves on the back of his head, guiding him to suck Hannibal into his mouth. It was a high, plain and simple, an addictive narcotic more profound than any physical substance, to bring that beast out of Hannibal as if he was the only one with a key to his cage. To see how a little surrender like this to sloppy, indecent passion would bring them both to a little death in due time.

"You're mine," Will said in a low growl before he obeyed his Daddy's wishes and took him deep into his mouth.

"Yes," Hannibal gasped, holding Will's head firmly in place and pushing deep into the velvety sweetness of his mouth. Inside Will, he blocked out every other thought, feeling, or need; he was thick, heavy, hot and slick, leaving a trail of precum on Will's eagerly lapping tongue. Soon, Will gave him a *look* with his big blue eyes that demanded and begged -- somehow, both at once, a skill he'd developed without realizing it -- for more, for the privilege of Hannibal's unbridled desire, to have complete honesty from this man who shared himself with no one.

"Hold still," Hannibal grunted, shoving his hips forward with animal ferocity, no grace, just hunger, their own secret language, drenched in darkness that might be shadow or blood or both. "Breathe through your nose when you need to. Keep your cheeks tight, your pretty

cheeks." He stroked Will's flushed face, then returned both hands to his nape and fucked three times into Will, deep and hard, finally hitting the back of Will's throat and taking his breath.

Will grabbed Hannibal's ass and kept the rhythm mutual, bobbing his head eagerly and obediently in time with his lover's strokes, taking deep breaths through his nose. Distantly, he registered shock at the gagging noises he made, but more immediately there was the pleasure of being taken so hard, there was realizing Hannibal wanted him so much he couldn't hide his tumultuous, unreasonable passion; he would take Will, he would do whatever he wanted to Will. *Yes, yes,* Will was euphoric; his eyes on Hannibal were dreamy, and Hannibal watched him through a half-lidded, lust-blown cinnamon glaze, grunting, growling, gasping out inhuman noises, dripping sex plunging between Will's tight lips, getting even harder and thicker as he glided back and forth over Will's tongue.

Finally, he pulled himself out and Will looked up at him disappointed for a moment, his lips swollen and moist with precum and saliva, his hands trembling over Hannibal's hips, squeezing, almost crushing, craving more. His own cock pressed harsh and hard to his jeans again, and Hannibal's eyes roved over him.

The doctor licked his lips and grabbed Will under his shoulders, tossing him inside the house with a savage gravel in his voice, "On the bed for me, baby. Clothes off. Hands and knees for Daddy."

He left the front door open, a cold breeze drifting in that enhanced Will's heady awareness of their hedonistic exhibitionism, a lust so brave and bold and bright it wanted them to show off, be as naughty as possible in every different way they could think of all at once, *too much,* riotous, never enough.

Will yanked off his coat and what was left of his shirt, got his jeans off with a heated moan at the painfully sensitive length throbbing between his legs, now bare as the rest of him. He crouched on his bed (he'd never even had sex with someone else in this bed in this house until Hannibal, and now he was glad), shaking from head to toe, letting out feral little grunts and gasps of anticipation, and Hannibal was behind him all of a sudden, caressing one supple ass cheek, stroking it with so much love, then pulling back and spanking him, sharp, rough and fast, growling, "Can you take it, baby?"

"I love it," Will gasped, and he saw over his shoulder that Hannibal was naked, gorgeous, like a god, big and imposing, glorious.

"Tell me, Daddy, what did I do to earn a spanking?" He knew he was pushing it, dewy-eyed and raspy-voiced from the deep-throating, his curves quickly reddening under Hannibal's loving hand.

"This is for every naughty thing you have ever done, Will." Hannibal answered gruffly.

He was Someone Else entirely from the man he showed the world; there was no elegance, best of all there were no defenses. "This is for the little coy, teasing looks--" He squeezed and spanked, then reached between Will's legs and stroked his cock with breathtaking skill, and

with his ass still tingling in delightful pain, Will really thought he might come right then, but he managed to swallow and hold back, giving into Hannibal's touch but not all the way.

"This is for the way you touch my things and treat my office as if it's your own domain, for the way you like to stand with your back to me, displaying yourself as if for the taking, for the way you say 'Doctor.'" Hannibal's hair fell softly over his forehead and his eyes shifted from darkly intent and accusing to vulnerable, as if a switch had flipped once again without his permission. He went on stroking Will, and bent to kiss his ass, then lick at his hole, making Will moan loudly and clench the sheets, trembling and sweating.

He never knew he would like the way that felt, a man's tongue on his hole, flat to this unexplored erogenous zone, letting saliva drip all over him, blowing hot breath and getting Will to mewl, discovering new pleasure, letting Hannibal evoke his relaxation, the idea of being open to Hannibal inside him, *yes*.

"For making me love you, when I swore I would never love anyone," Hannibal added huskily.

He spread Will's cheeks and kissed him hard, lapping at his hole with devastating expertise, carefully pressing his tongue just slightly inside. His confession sent a shockwave of emotion through Will at the same time his oral attentions made more pleasure spread through his body, precum dribbling from Will's cock while it stiffened further and he clung to the bedding, almost drooling onto the pillow. His heart squeezed with a painfully acute adoration: Hannibal had sworn off love entirely, but somehow he loved *Will*? How could Will be that special? Could he be this lucky, how could they have been lucky enough to find each other?

"I love you," Will said, knowing he'd been moaning and moaning, loud and with total abandon, and he didn't care. He could be himself. Hannibal would accept nothing less, and he wanted Daddy's approval and praise, the way he wanted to keep breathing.

"Daddy, I want you inside me," he begged, spreading his legs and pivoting his hips to expose and display himself even more.

"Daddy has to teach you how to take all of him," Hannibal answered, leaving a brisk bite on the flushed, sensitive skin of Will's ass that made him keen and gasp. "Let's start with my fingers, baby, are you ready?"

"Yes," Will sobbed, realizing he was crying. He didn't know how long he'd been crying since he got on the bed and Hannibal came up behind him, it might have been the whole time. "Yes, please, please don't make me wait."

Hannibal found the lube in Will's bedside table drawer and gave him a smoldering look. Although he'd never used the lubricant on his ass, Will had nearly emptied the bottle with the number of times he'd slicked himself up and gained pleasure from his own hand. The continuing realization of Will's powerful sex drive truly did arouse and please Hannibal, so that Will wasn't sure now why he had ever been ashamed of it and let previous partners shame him. He wasn't pathetic or "too needy," after all. Daddy loved him, he would show him the way to be satisfied as often as he needed, not alone and hating himself the whole

time; safe, protected and adored, cherished because he *was* that special, as nearly impossible as it was to believe, Will was starting to believe it.

The lube was cool and sticky as Hannibal drizzled it liberally over Will's ass, then his own hand. He teased, circling Will's aching, fluttering hole with his finger, and Will had never felt the need to be touched there, but now it was all he could think about, what it would be like to have Hannibal pressed deeply inside him, making him whole. Loneliness was more a distant memory with every precious moment of this.

"What a good boy you are," Hannibal murmured, pushing just the very tip of one finger inside the tight ring of virginal muscle. Will shuddered and whimpered, and Hannibal caressed him gently, his back and his hips, large, capable hands smoothing over his ass and thighs, centering him in love. "So good for Daddy, so perfect. I'm so proud of you, my dear."

"Can't I have more now, Daddy?" Will pleaded. In some hazy corner of his mind, his former self, who would never have called another man 'Daddy' or begged for more during sex was still very shocked, and it made Will blush deeper.

"Of course, mylimasis." Hannibal smiled down at him and pressed his finger in more, to the second knuckle.

Will's knees wobbled on the bed; the pressure of Hannibal's hand hurt a little because he'd never done this before, but the sensation was also so exquisite, he moaned wetly into the sheets, almost as if he would come untouched if this continued much longer. His cock hung heavy between his shaking thighs, and he blurted, "*More*" so that Hannibal growled and added more lube, then sank his finger in all the way.

"Oh, God," Will gasped.

Hannibal caressed him softly all over with his free hand. "Breathe, Will, I have you. Remember, I'm yours."

Will's heart thudded so hard he was sure it would break under the immensity of this love and longing, the shattering intensity of this perfect touch after years of insecure solitude and unreturned yearning.

"I'm yours," he whispered, "Hannibal, I'm yours."

Hannibal began sliding his finger in and out of Will, the other hand clamped possessively to his ass. "You're beautiful, inside and out," he praised, astounded at the feeling of Will's body squeezing his finger. "My gorgeous, perfect boy. You're pure silken heat, you're stunning, so very, very good for Daddy. Would you like another finger now?"

"Mmm, yes, please." Will sighed rapturously as Hannibal pressed a second digit inside him and this time, immediately sank in to the hilt. A new sensation swept through him, startling Will as he looked back at Hannibal in confusion. Slowly, as Hannibal began to fuck him with slick, long, thick fingers pulling almost all the way out, then back into to press that sensitive, blossoming center of pleasure within, it dawned on Will that this was prostate stimulation, but he barely had time to think about that before the blissful swelling cry for more flowed

from inside his body into his words, and he heard himself saying, “Another finger, right there, harder -- please!”

“Right there, baby,” Hannibal soothed, still massaging and caressing him outside as he plunged deeper and harder inside. The third finger was absolutely sublime, and now there was so much of Hannibal stroking into Will, sparking waves of powerful pleasure, drawing them with firm insistence to a breaking point.

You don’t want to break me, after all--

Oh, but Will wasn’t a fragile teacup; his fragility was too intense for that; he was strong and virile and alive; he had needs and he could take what he wanted. He had breath and love and this pleasure, vibrating and thrumming through his being, he was the stag from his dream, the one with the sleek raven soulmate dripping blood and menace, a vision from which he used to flee; now he followed it deeper.

And Hannibal was deeper, clasping Will’s face, leaning over him, slamming three fingers in and out while he kissed Will’s mouth, sucked his lower lip, nibbled him, repeated the cycle, groaned and rasped out enamored declarations of Will’s beauty and good behavior, mixing kisses and praise and strokes until it happened without warning. Will burst all over the bed with a shocked mewl, not having realized he could do that without touching his cock. He trembled almost convulsively and cried, immediately finding himself wrapped in Hannibal’s warm, reassuring embrace. Hannibal didn’t seem to care about the wet spot on the bed or Will’s dripping stickiness as he clutched the younger man close and stroked his damp curls, kissed his brow and hummed in pleasured approval.

“You’re really all mine, aren’t you, darling? You feel how much I am yours?” Hannibal’s big, warm hands held Will by his back and his thigh, letting Will wrap around him the way he liked.

“Yes,” Will sighed, looking into his eyes, drawing him into another kiss, this time not harsh and demanding, but equally heady in its languorous, savoring delight. He rutted against Hannibal’s thick, hard cock and the angle was awkward; he was still learning, but his lover’s erection slid against his thigh, making Hannibal gasp.

He wanted so desperately to make Hannibal come after all that dedicated attention and care he’d just been shown; he had never cared for anyone like this, as if a dam had ruptured in his heart and he was joyfully drowning.

“Lie back,” he beckoned, and Hannibal did, running his own trembling fingers over Will’s biceps and forearms as the younger man climbed astride him.

“My handsome Daddy,” Will murmured, making Hannibal blush, which always came as the sweetest surprise. “Let me take care of you now.”

He knew it wouldn’t take long; he knew by now, how Hannibal got. The way he would always dedicate himself first to Will’s pleasure, allowing his own need to ratchet to such a tense near-shattering point that he was desperately sensitive himself by the time it was his turn. And the touch of Will’s hand, the feel of his mouth enveloping, just the simple

realization of Will's desire for him was still a dawning thing, so that he could be pushed over the edge by Will's most gently innocent nudge.

So it was again, as Will applied himself with only slightly improved understanding of how to suck a man off. It shouldn't have worked, maybe; he was just licking and stroking again, without Hannibal pushing into him or grabbing him in place to *make* him do the right thing; now he was only guessing, going by what he thought he might like himself, by what Hannibal had shown him so far that he was still storing up in his memory. But that's all he needed to do, as Hannibal rasped out his name, called him a good boy, let his hips arch and his hand clasp tighter on Will's curls. He came generously into Will's mouth, and it wasn't about the cum tasting good in particular, although it wasn't bad either; salty and bitter, fascinating. *Hannibal,* the taste was Hannibal at his most vulnerably intimate and open; Will treated it with reverence, swallowing every drop he could get. He loved it; he was in love.

He kissed his way back up Hannibal's body, leaving lingering, biting sucks on Hannibal's stomach, then softer, teasing kisses on his chest and neck; they kissed each other's mouths again. Will was proud again of how he was learning, while also amazed by how he'd grown obsessed with every part of Hannibal's body, so that it was hard to stop touching or kissing. He'd even gotten brave enough to be a little rough in return to Hannibal's steamy gestures of the same.

They pressed their foreheads together and breathed hard for a few moments; then Hannibal laughed softly and nuzzled his nose against Will's. "Mylimasis, my only one, my darling."

The praise kept making Will giddy. "I love you, Daddy," he smiled, warmly contented and elated at the same time.

Just then, they heard a car approaching Will's driveway, and Will gave a comical gasp-laugh, leaping from the bed to throw the door shut and scramble back into his clothes.

Hannibal gave him a saucy look and Jesus Christ, if it wasn't for the engine cutting off outside and the muffled sounds of dogs cheerfully barking getting closer, Will would have had him again right then.

Thankfully, Hannibal was able to find his trousers and retrieve his rumpled shirt from near the front door, shrugging it on right as the doorbell rang.

Will, red-faced and with swollen, over-kissed lips, dressed in a t-shirt and hastily thrown-on jeans, cleared his throat and gave Hannibal a naughty grin before he opened the door.

Alana stood there with a primly suspicious expression not immune to a slight tinge of amusement. The dogs all bustled in, making a beeline for their owner as Will leaned down to greet and pet them.

"Hi!" Will said with sunshine beaming from his well-loved, satisfied demeanor. "I missed you all!" He petted Winston's head, scratched behind Buster's ears, calmed Zoe's overzealous leaping up on him. "We're back together, I'm all better now and you're back home for good!"

This was all very cute and endearing, but despite that, Alana shot Hannibal a mildly accusing look.

“It’s always a pleasure to see you, Alana. Thank you for looking after the dogs,” Hannibal greeted serenely.

“Hmm. You say that as if they’re not only Will’s dogs now, but yours as well.” Alana’s smile was complicated; it rested somewhere between the obligation for disapproval and a more instinctual good humor.

“Perhaps I did,” Hannibal smiled. “Would you like to stay for coffee?”

“Please have a coffee with us,” Will enthused. By now, he was sitting on the floor while the dogs piled around him, seeking attention which he bestowed fairly and liberally. He laughed, “You took such good care of them, I really can’t thank you enough.”

Alana melted slightly. “You’re welcome, Will. I’m happy to look after them anytime. I guess…” She looked discerningly between her former mentor and the man she’d kissed a few weeks ago. “A coffee sounds good.”

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“I’m not really sure where to start, but we obviously need to talk about what’s been going on with you two,” Alana said, blowing on her coffee, then taking a small sip. She sat across the table from Hannibal and Will, and they had to make an obvious effort to wrench their eyes from each other to pay her any attention at all.

Hannibal was exceedingly pleased; he had not thought this day could get any better, but now his former rival for Will’s affections was confronted with the fact that Will Graham was most decidedly spoken for.

“What is it exactly you think is going on, Alana?” Hannibal looked at her with expectant amusement.

“Well, where should we start? The fact that it looks like hyenas attacked your bed over there?” She nodded at Will’s bed, and Will glanced over at the state of it. An accurate statement. He blushed and bit his lip; Hannibal beamed at him. “The *beard burn* on your neck, Hannibal, or the hickeys on Will’s? Oh, and by the way, I love what you’ve done with your shirt. Is buttonless the new fashion statement these days, and I just missed the memo?”

“Ah, so you wish to converse about our romantic relationship,” Hannibal concluded, as if it had taken him this long to guess. His angelic expression made Will stifle a laugh.

Will cleared his throat again. His voice was still a bit hoarse, after all, and he sat gingerly. That spanking hadn't been severe enough to leave him overly sore, but Hannibal would still apply some salve as soon as Alana left. For now, Will asked, “Is there really a need for a formal conversation, Dr. Bloom?”

Hannibal truly wished Will would not call her “doctor,” but he was easily consoled for that by the annoyed look on Will’s face, clearly skating the line between wanting to maintain a friendly feeling towards Alana, and getting pretty snide.

“After all, you were never my therapist, never my significant other; I thought we were friends.” With a shrug, he added, “Shouldn’t you be happy for us?”

“Will, you’ve been spiraling since the day I met you,” Alana pointed out, still infusing her words with quiet, patient concern despite Will’s obvious frustration and Hannibal’s cheerful silent mockery. “I just don’t think that jumping into a relationship is what’s best for you right now.”

“Spiraling? I was sick," Will reminded her, but she shook her head.

“Not the whole time I’ve known you, Will. Look, you’re just coming off of a terrible ordeal; you’ve been working yourself to the bone, and you’ve never slowed down long enough to deal with the things that have made you, in the past, maybe now too -- feel unstable.”

“And now we are Abigail’s guardians,” Hannibal put in coolly. “Surely that has you concerned as well.”

“I care about Abigail,” Alana clarified, “And believe it or not, I care about both of you. Something about this relationship you’ve entered into, complete with a ready-made family, seems too fast, too convenient--”

“I’m confused; just how is it exactly that you think our relationship will negatively impact Abigail?” Will was getting feisty now; Hannibal felt his usual lustful response stirring as his lover’s brow furrowed and Will's sumptuous lips formed a scowl.

“She needs stability, a reliable picture of how the next few months of her life are going to look,” Alana explained calmly. “You two are rushing into something, heedless of how the fallout could affect others. Abigail starts to see you two as her fathers, and then one day you break up or worse--”

“What’s the ‘worse’?” Will frowned, his voice turned steely. “I drag Hannibal into my dark world and we both become killers, just like Garret Jacob Hobbs? We ruin her chance to regain stability; maybe we kill her, maybe we go on some murder spree and become best friends with the Chesapeake Ripper?”

“Whoa, slow down, Will,” Alana sighed, putting a hand to her brow. “I didn’t mean to suggest anything that drastic. All I’m asking is that the two of you try to be sensible.”

“An understandable request,” Hannibal suggested, putting on a show of attempting to keep the peace when secretly, Will’s entire tangent had him enchanted. It was practically his wish list, after all, sans Abigail’s death of course.

He saw the three of them as a family, united by a commonality of seeing the world in a different, far more inventive light than outsiders could ever understand. They would do just as they liked then, he and Will, and they would be Abigail’s protectors. When the time was

right, they could hunt together, make their own place in the world. And lately, it felt as if Will was nearly ready for Hannibal's full confession, to see him truly and accept all that he was. He only hoped it was not wishful thinking on his part.

Hannibal gave Will a look which the younger man easily interpreted, one that said they should placate Alana Bloom for the time being as nothing was to be gained by burning this bridge.

"I'm just tired of being questioned about my personal life as if it's really anyone else's place to tell me what to do with it," Will sighed, opting for honesty. "I know you mean well, Alana, but at the moment I'm really tempted to take that cup of coffee away from you and tell you to get lost."

"At the moment, I'm really tempted to tell Jack you two are an item," Alana retorted.

"He already knows, actually." Hannibal spoke blithely enough that the others looked at him aghast. "Well, really. It is not as if we have been all that subtle, Will."

"You're glad he knows," Will said, his shoulders relaxing slightly.

"Why shouldn't he? I'm proud for anyone to know how highly I regard you, Will." He clasped Will's hand atop the table and smiled over at Alana. "I appreciate and respect your concern, as well as Jack's, Alana. But you must understand that Will and I can take care of ourselves, and each other, as it happens. We've made note of your comments and will take them into consideration, but that is all we can offer on the subject."

"Hey, I'm not the bad guy here, and I'm *not* Jack Crawford," Alana laughed, "I don't want to have to say these things, but I'd consider it irresponsible to stand by and not say them. Of course I'm happy if you're both happy."

She watched thoughtfully as Winston approached Hannibal, nudging against his leg as the doctor patted his head, completing the natural domestic feeling of the moment. Will looked at Hannibal with stars in his eyes, so wistful and fond.

"The truth is, I've never seen either of you this happy or relaxed," she concluded. "I'm sorry if I overstepped…"

"I'm sorry, too," Will answered, "For overreacting and being so defensive. I do have some cookies around here somewhere if that would help make up for it."

Alana chuckled. "Cookies can solve anything."

Hannibal drank his coffee, musing to himself that both Jack and Alana were far too well-intentioned for their own good. Their empathy for Hannibal and Will's happiness, their hesitance to see through to the nefarious possibilities simmering between the new lovers, would quite possibly be their downfall. It did not honestly matter much to Hannibal whether either of them lived or died; he would enjoy killing either or both, and coming up with a suitable tribute to them in the meal he made them into. After all, both Alana and Jack were entertaining in their way, mostly for the way he could toy with them for his own amusement.

They were nothing more than pawns on his chessboard, but the chessboard was changing. Once Hannibal ruled it as king, and every other figure on the playing field was a trinket for him to move around or eliminate depending on his mood. Now there was a new figure on the board, his Prince, the one to rule him. If Will came into his own as a killer, everyone else in their realm ought to be deathly frightened.

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“You know, I may be on leave from work, but you're not,” Will smiled over at Hannibal that evening. The older man sat in the armchair before the space heater, perusing a collection of short stories he’d plucked from Will’s bookshelf. Will sat on the rug between his legs, his face pressed against Hannibal’s thigh, his curls spilled beguilingly over his brow. The dogs were sleeping in a half-circle at a short distance, and Will’s own chosen book, a collection of e.e. cummings poems, lay half-open on his knee. A glass of red wine sat beside each of them, and they were both pleasantly full from the dinner Hannibal had made them, creating a miraculous feast out of the sparse contents of Will’s fridge and cupboards. On the old boombox atop Will’s bookshelf in the corner, his usual classic rock station played softly.

“Hmm?” Hannibal inquired, playing with Will’s hair, twisting the curls around his fingers just to let them bounce free. “Why do you mention it, my dear?”

“Because you’ve been by my side for quite a while now, cancelling all your appointments, and I don’t want you to get fired on my account.”

“Ah easily resolved,” Hannibal replied smoothly. “I promise not to fire myself.”

“*You,*” Will chuckled, playfully biting his thigh through the latest pair of pajama pants Hannibal had borrowed from him. Like the sweatpants, they were ridiculously tight on him, hugging his body in a way Will had zero objections to. “C’mon, you know what I mean. There’s only so many appointments you can cancel before your clients decide to go elsewhere.”

“I had planned on returning to the office in a few days,” Hannibal explained, smoothing his hand over Will’s face, then tracing his lips. In the warm lamp light of the cozy room, he looked so angelic, it hurt Hannibal’s heart in the most wonderful way. “Simply to give me time to help you prepare for the move.”

“For me moving in with you, into your *mansion,*” Will smiled, leaning rapturously into his touch. “I can’t believe this is my life.”

“It’s not technically a mansion, but I hope you will be very happy there, mylimasis.”

“I’d be happy with a shack in the woods if you were there.” Will leaned into his palm and bit it softly.

“You’d be happy with a shack in the woods in any case,” Hannibal said, making them both laugh.

“I can still go fishing and play with my dogs if I live with you,” Will answered, shrugging. “I can still work on boats and come and go as I like, so...if you can acclimate to my individual quirks, I guess I can find a way to get used to living in the lap of luxury.”

“You were born for a life of luxury,” Hannibal assured him.

He stood and helped Will to his feet, then positioned them for dancing as Will went along with a gentle laugh of submission to the whim. The song “Don’t Dream it’s Over” had never seemed quite so apt to Will; he melted into the dance and Hannibal’s murmured statements while they moved and swayed with natural chemistry and grace.

"Hey now, don’t dream it’s over / hey now, hey now when the world comes in / they come, they come / to build a wall between us / you know that they won’t win…" The words of the song struck a chord with Will that made him move even closer to Hannibal, listening intently to the way the older man told of their future.

“You were made to be loved and thoroughly spoiled, to enjoy all the finer things in life. Most of all, Will, I want you to know you will always have the very best of everything I can give you. The best of me.”

Will looked up at him devotedly, following his lead, loving the firm way Hannibal held and guided him. “I love you, Hannibal. That means a lot to me, more than I can say. And I *also* know you’re still holding back on me. You have secrets. I can feel it.”

Hannibal was momentarily silenced; nervousness lanced him anew and he shifted his grip on Will’s hand, perplexed.

“Take your time getting ready to tell me all about you,” Will encouraged him gently. “That’s fine. Do you remember when you told me you’re not going anywhere?”

“Yes,” Hannibal answered too hoarsely, his eyes bright on Will’s caring expression. “I’d never leave you, Will, unless you asked me to.”

“Well, the feeling’s mutual. As mutual as the fact that we both get possessive, jealous, and *apparently* sexually insatiable for each other.” Will’s eyes sparkled and Hannibal laughed quietly.

“We did ruin two perfectly good shirts, and I’m not certain your mattress will ever be quite the same,” Hannibal said.

“Good thing I’m moving in with a guy who has the bed of an aristocratic vampire.” Will smirked and Hannibal was so, so weak for him.

“Good thing.”

“Even though everyone else has an opinion on whether we’re allowed to be in love or if they think we’re moving too fast, I know we’re on the same page. We want the best for Abigail and we can figure it all out.”

“Yes, Will,” Hannibal replied, filled with hope this would be true. He only wished he could put perfect optimism into his voice, but as he spoke he heard his own insecurity, and knew Will must feel it too. “You’re right. There is nothing we cannot confront, nor resolve, if we work together.”

Will nodded. He accepted where they were now, that Hannibal had not yet shared all of himself, but one day he would. He wrapped his arms around Hannibal’s neck, snuggling his face into his lover’s chest as they continued dancing. Hannibal’s grip on his waist tightened, and they breathed each other in.

“Do you mind if I ask you for one more thing?”

“Anything.” Hannibal blinked back tears as Will leaned up to brush a kiss to his flushed cheek.

Will smiled, as it seemed all his worries had been alleviated; did he consciously intuit any of the deep changes happening between them that were more than physical, rather metaphysical and consuming, the animal call in them for the hunt and the delirious passion it would ignite? Perhaps for tonight, once again Hannibal could relax and let go of not having all the answers, despite a lingering undercurrent of guilt and regret that there was still a large and looming lie between them.

“Can I have the next dance, too?”

Hannibal brushed a curl behind Will’s ear and told him emphatically, “You can have all of my dances, Will, forever.”

Expectations

Chapter Notes

> cw: This chapter features some angsty times for our boys. Just wanted to assure you it is temporary and we are on course for a happy ending, with plenty of fluffy and sexy times still to come. Inevitably, we had to come to this point for Will and Hannibal to be able to move forward in their relationship, and it isn't going to be easy for them at first. But then as Taylor Swift has so wisely informed us, "nothing safe is worth the drive." They will find their way back home in time. 🖤

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“So what’s it like, living in Castle Lecter?” Beverly asked wryly when Will talked to her on the phone a week after moving in with Hannibal.

“It’s not an *actual* castle,” Will chortled as he surveyed the vast pantry of Hannibal’s kitchen. Well, he reminded himself, *their* kitchen now.

“You’re dodging the question, Graham, give me the dirt. Does he have any bad habits? Does he wait too long to put the trash out, does he forget the fabric softener when he does laundry? Oh! Does he secretly eat fast food at 1 in the morning?”

“No, his only bad habit is a tendency to go off on long, ponderous tangents about the history and cultural significance of every recipe he makes, but to be honest with you, I really love listening.” Will smiled to himself, checking several shelves in his search for the flour he’d need to make gravy for his planned dinner.

He wanted Hannibal to come home from work today to find Will busy in the kitchen, making them something truly scrumptious, making Daddy proud. In fact, he was excited to spoil Hannibal a little as a ‘thank you’ for the way he had upended Will’s sadness-drenched existence and brought him so much joy, made him feel comfortable in his own skin for the first time. When Hannibal returned from the office, it would feel like his husband coming in after a long work day, in need of a drink and a shoulder rub, then a nice, rich dinner and some reading by the fireplace...later on, several rounds of lusciously relentless sex.

He wasn’t quite sure why his domestic fantasy resembled an unusually dirty 1960’s sitcom, but like most things these days, he was happy to roll with it, follow his instincts. It was fun, being himself, the sort of novel experience he could really get used to.

“That’s just sickeningly adorable. You’re so gone on this guy,” Beverly laughed, and Will let her say it uncontested; there was no point denying it.

“It’s nice to hear you so happy,” she continued, echoing Alana’s sentiments. “Guess you’re settling into the lap of luxury a little easier than expected.”

“Yes, except I can’t find the flour anywhere...oh, wait a minute, maybe he’s got everything organized in alphabetical order…yup, he does...that’s ridiculous….ly cute.” He finally found the bag next to the fettuccine and fish oil.

Will placed the flour neatly beside the beef broth he’d already set out on the counter, put Beverly on speakerphone, and got to work preparing the potatoes and carrots. “So, how’s everything going with--”

“Oh, no you don’t,” Beverly objected. “You’re on leave, Will. This is supposed to be your time to relax, breathe, get used to cohabitating with your rich, handsome doctor boyfriend. If I start talking cases, you’ll feel obligated to contribute.”

“I can’t decide if there’s just something about me that makes people want to coddle me,” Will noted as he peeled the potatoes, “Or if you just know me well enough to be well-aware that’s exactly what would happen.”

“Both, obviously. The coddling thing is probably the curls and the big eyes; totally not your fault. As for the knowing you thing, we’re friends, Will. Listen, Jack is still *Jack,* the cases are still rolling in but the Ripper’s been dormant. By our twisted standards, it’s been a relatively peaceful period.”

He laughed darkly, sweeping the potato peelings into the trash and getting the beef out of the fridge. “The Ripper has never been dormant. He wants you to think he’s taking a break, so when he comes back in full flush, you’ll never see it coming. But the Copycat? The Man on the Phone the day we got Garret Jacob Hobbs?”

Will focused his attention on the heavy cast-iron skillet he’d just placed on the stovetop, trying not to think about the way he’d phrased that last sentence, neatly tiptoeing around the more accurate and exciting phrase, *”the day I killed Hobbs.*”

“You think the Ripper did all that,” Beverly concluded. He could picture her, chewing her lip in thought, tapping a pen on her desk. “It seems awfully coincidental to me, as if he’s some kind of fan of yours, or something.”

Will had thought of that before, and unfortunately found it very flattering, so he tried not to let the idea linger.

“We’ll see,” he said blandly, finding he kind of agreed with Beverly: this conversation was dragging him off his cloud of domestic bliss and back into the world of chasing killers, where he’d never felt safe.

If he dwelled too long on thoughts of how good it felt to kill Hobbs (euphoric, revelatory in fact), or how the Ripper’s potential admiration was almost arousing (how awful, nearly unfaithful to Hannibal, what was wrong with him?), he might not be able to extricate himself from the darkness again. The scary, deranged side of life had a hunger for Will; it would snap him up from this contentment with ravenous jaws as soon as he gave the slightest indication he was ready to look back down the rabbit hole.

“I guess we will,” Beverly said, and he could practically hear her shrugging. How nice it must be, to have a job like that without it following her home. He couldn’t really fathom being able to let go of the cases at the end of the day.

“Anyway, now that we’ve gotten your ‘tell me about work’ attempt out of the way, are you ready to hear about this *disaster* date I went on last week?”

He laughed, shaking off the disturbing thought tangent before it could fully solidify. He pictured the shadows of his murderous fantasies shuddering off his skin like a cloud of darkness drifting harmlessly to the floor.

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Hannibal was having a delightful day, and the only thing that could possibly improve it was to come home to his new life with Will. Gone was the dull ache of his loneliness, survived only by a distantly foreboding echo of paranoia: he lived in the here and now, and here and now he and Will were perfectly happy, but would this remain the case once Will knew all about him? The need for Will to know so that they could get past the obligatory bump in the road which finding out Hannibal was the Ripper might cause...it was a worthy rival for his equally strong instinct to keep lying lest he risk losing Will forever. Nobody could live for long like this, suspended, every moment of his time with Will a matter of confusing guilt, the sense of stealing the moments and storing them up in his memory palace to possibly sustain him if they should ever part. The not-knowing was slowly killing him, even on the best days, and today had been truly lovely; his knuckles still throbbed with the delicious thrill of a recent kill, and the insulated grocery bag he brought home with him was filled with choice cuts of human meat.

But Will did not know he was the Ripper, and Hannibal did not know if he would be forgiven and accepted. His otherwise happy smile faltered slightly because of it as he eased the front door open and stepped inside the foyer with its severe yet reassuring shades of grey and blue. He had chosen every detail of his home to subtly warn others not to get too close; that he was icy and unreachable, above and beyond them, someone to be impressed by, not someone to be trifled with or bothered. How remarkable, that Will had moved in and all of a sudden his house was a home for the first time rather than a hideaway, a lair, an extension of his false persona of perfect grace and dignity. The basement, with its gruesome secrets, showed the truth of him, but Will had yet to venture downstairs, operating out of total trust in his lover and not feeling any need to hunt through the house seeking clues as to Hannibal’s clandestine activities.

“Honey, you’re home,” Will said warmly, appearing like something out of a dream in the foyer.

His cheeks were flushed with the heat of the stove, which made sense since Hannibal’s keen nose had scented out savory beef, vegetables and potatoes as soon as he came in. One of Hannibal’s plain white aprons was wrapped around Will’s lovely, slender hips, and the boy was dressed to perfection in one of several new outfits which Hannibal had commissioned for him from Emiliano. The dove grey, skinny-fit suit reflected Will’s more relaxed but quite elegant new style in a beguiling way, especially as Will had left off the jacket and tie, resplendent with his white shirt left open at the collar. His curls had been slicked back, but

the heat of cooking had loosened them, leaving several to tumble free over Will's pretty brow. When Will brushed a quick "hello" kiss to Hannibal's longing lips, Hannibal tasted a hint of Chardonnay and a glow of joy.

Will's bright blue eyes were open and excited, shining with the hope for affirmation and the expectation they were going to have another wonderful evening together, as they always did. He was barely recognizable as the rumpled, woebegotten boy of Hannibal's earlier acquaintance, and it made the killer wonder if he was equally changed by their love (a potentially frightening, but perhaps inevitable conclusion).

He wondered other things as well, taking a few beats to frame that beautiful face in his hands and recover his faltering countenance when it almost made him burst into ridiculous, weak tears to see his lover like this, in his element, in their home, waiting for him. He wondered how he was supposed to get anything done, ever again, if Will was going to give him that innocently sexy smile, the most stunning smile in creation, and the most arousing. How was he ever going to go back to a cold and solitary existence, the same one that used to serve him quite well, if this relationship were to go asunder? He gripped Will's arm tightly for a moment, then pressed a gentle kiss to his cheek. Will registered only mild concern at Hannibal's conflicting gestures, the possessive squeeze and tender kiss.

"I still can't quite believe you're really here, mylimasis," he admitted by way of explanation.

"Well, I am," Will murmured, pressing close and slipping his hands under Hannibal's coat to hook around his back with equal possessiveness. He gave Hannibal a hug, nuzzled into his chest with a sigh at the doctor's strong, warm body and the scent of his cologne. "I told you that you might have to get used to having me around, remember?"

Hannibal hummed, dropping the grocery bag to the floor so that he could wrap his arms around Will and bury his face in the soft curls in a brief surrender to insuperable yearning for what they still did not have: the certainty of truth and recognition. "Whatever you have been cooking smells outstanding."

"Well, coming from you, that's a huge compliment," Will flirted.

"Daddy is so very proud of his good boy," Hannibal praised softly, loving the way his words made Will moan and snuggle in closer. "Coming home to you is the best part of my day, dear one."

"It's the best part of my day, too," Will grinned. How Hannibal feared every smile might be the last, how the premonition had poisoned his old charmed life and made it a purgatory.

Will drew back from their embrace to help Hannibal out of his coat. In the process, he noticed a fiery red hair stuck to the grey wool and frowned. "You saw Freddie Lounds today?"

"Indeed," Hannibal acknowledged as his heart hammered too harshly. His mouth was dry, but he had allowed this evidence to remain on his person with the distinct intention of dropping breadcrumbs. How cowardly, that he could not simply state his confession to Will in words. Recognizing his own weakness on the matter was perhaps the most painful aspect of the

whole quiet ordeal. “She attempted to conduct an unofficial interview with me regarding our relationship to Abigail. Obvious quote-mongering for the so-called memoir she is essentially planning to ghostwrite on Abigail’s behalf.”

“Hmmph,” Will frowned as they went through to the kitchen, “She’ll twist every quote into some despicable interpretation.”

“Her vulgarity has always offended you,” said Hannibal casually, setting the groceries on the center island. He unpacked the bags of meat and slotted them neatly into the refrigerator as Will poured him a glass of wine.

“I hope you didn’t give her one word of answer,” Will answered, as if annoyed Freddie had sullied the idyllic loveliness of Hannibal’s homecoming. Hannibal could tell he couldn’t wait for this part of their conversation to be over, so they could talk about anything else. “She’s got some nerve, assaulting you like that -- at the office?”

“Yes, I found her in my waiting room,” Hannibal clarified, taking his wine glass from Will while their fingers brushed and his hand shook ever so slightly. Will noticed the trembling in his fingers and shot him another confused look. “As you’ll recall, I warned her not to return to my place of business after the day she recorded our session.”

“Thank you for making sure that tape was destroyed,” Will shuddered.

“Of course, mylimasis, think nothing of it. And now let us put aside all thought of Ms. Louds’ obnoxious behavior. Tell me, is that a shepherd's pie I smell?”

“You know it is,” Will smirked, gathering plates to set the table. “You could probably identify any cuisine blindfolded from a mile away.”

It was a simple moment crystallized in time, Hannibal standing by the center island with his wine glass, smiling at Will as if he had hung the moon; Will holding the dishes he intended to bring into the dining room, pausing just to meet Hannibal’s gaze. The flicker of hunger between them, the love and desire. Their mutual disbelief that this love was theirs to keep, the way life had taught them both that dreams were castles of sand and the only thing they could really depend on was the tide to sweep all hopes away.

The moment passed, and Hannibal swallowed drily, not having touched his wine. Will’s phone buzzed from the counter and the younger man gave him an apologetic look. “Sorry, I’ll just get rid of whoever this is.”

He glanced down at the screen as Hannibal’s heart sank. “It’s Jack,” Will announced, surprised.

“I think you’d better answer it then,” Hannibal replied.

Will kept looking at him, bewildered by Hannibal’s grave manner, and the looking was the worst part, the *trust* in the boy’s gorgeous blue gaze, the blue seeping into Hannibal’s heart, ruining him for anything else other than loving Will.

“She is?” Will asked Jack, his eyes still locked to Hannibal’s as his throat bobbed. “When? Are you sure?” A pause, Hannibal silently brave against the tumult of his fears, Will’s gaze slowly shifting from concerned to accusatory.

“I’m on leave, Jack,” Will said flatly after Jack had elaborated with more explanation of the case that had prompted him to call. “You don’t need me for that.” He paused; Hannibal didn’t need to be in on the call to realize Jack was pleading with Will to come back and help with the investigation. “I’ll come back to work when I’m ready. Okay. Thanks for letting me know. Yes. Alright, bye.”

Will set his phone down beside the plates and napkins he would most decidedly not be using to set the table for their dinner.

“Freddie Lounds was murdered today by the Chesapeake Ripper,” Will said with quiet fury. Contents under pressure. Hannibal measured his reply carefully.

“Yes, she was.”

Slowly, Will rounded the center island until they stood face to face. “And you come home with her hair on your coat and a fresh assortment of meat for the fridge.”

Hannibal nodded, looking pointlessly down at his own blue plaid suit, for the simple reason that he couldn’t bear to keep staring into Will’s heartbroken, angry eyes. He felt incomprehensibly ashamed, not for who or what he was, but for the deception and its consequence.

“Yes.”

“If you wanted me to know that you are the Chesapeake Ripper, Hannibal, why didn’t you just tell me?” Will’s voice sounded the way it used to when they first met, brittle and in danger of snapping, like the man himself.

“Because you already knew it,” Hannibal revealed, glancing up at him. “Because you won’t let yourself consciously realize it.” He gathered his reserve of courage and added more firmly, “Since moving in, why have you never ventured to the basement?”

“What?” Will questioned, infuriated and impatient.

“You chose to serve the chardonnay from the refrigerator rather than going downstairs to get a bottle of merlot or cabernet. You much prefer red wine, and it would pair better with the meal. But you know, in your heart of hearts, what is down there, and you choose not to look.”

“Why does it seem for all the world like you are accusing me of something when I’m the one who just found out that the man I…” Will brushed tears away from his eyes in consternation; his jaw wobbled and he grimaced at his own overflow of horrified emotion. “The man I love is a cannibalistic serial killer and a goddamn liar.”

“I’m not accusing you of anything, Will,” said Hannibal softly. He longed to cup Will’s face, to kiss away his tears, but he held back, knowing that for once his touch would not be

wanted, nor accepted. So, it was just as he feared, but he could not collapse into his own insecurities now, when all they need do was traverse these perilous waters to find peace on the other side of this revelation.

“I apologize for not having been frank with you regarding my activities,” Hannibal continued as Will glared at him. “But I knew you would not be repressing your suspicions so aggressively if you believed yourself capable of loving me if we were to be honest on the subject. I have been so incomparably happy for the past few weeks that I have taken to procrastinating what we should have discussed quite some time ago.”

“Why are you so sure I already knew what you are?” Will demanded, his hand tightly fisted on the counter.

“You’ve known since the night I saved the organ thief’s near-victim in the back of the ambulance,” Hannibal told him, and the kindness in his voice, the lack of judgement made Will even surlier. “I saw it in your eyes, but then you shuttered them, rejecting the idea that the person you were coming to care for as a real friend could be capable of what you needed to consider atrocities.”

“You’re guilty of atrocities, horrible, disgusting crimes,” Will accused sharply. “There’s no *consideration* that can color your actions in any more forgiving shade.”

“I thought you might maintain that attitude. All the same, I’m glad you know.” Hannibal began to feel concerned that the conversation was slipping away from him, tugged into chaos by his own lovelorn bafflement at how much this man meant to him and how fearful he was of losing him. The words he intended as caring reassurances sounded uncannily condescending when he heard himself say them aloud.

Appropriately, Will’s face reddened and he scowled. “You are? Really? Why the hell would you be glad about that?”

“Because I don’t want to be loved, nor hated, for anything less than who I truly am.” Finally, it happened; Hannibal’s common sense shattered under the weight of Will’s angry disgust and he blurted out something smug and hurtful: “Can you say the same for yourself?”

Will's face crumpled. “Fuck you, Hannibal.”

He stormed away, through the kitchen as Hannibal glanced uselessly at the wooden knife holder on the counter, thinking how much easier it would be to grab a butcher knife and cut Will to pieces than to go on living like this, thinking that his whole life used to be that easy.

Hannibal heard Will summoning the dogs, heard their feet clopping obediently after their master, knew they would submit to being crowded into Will’s car because they were going back home. The dogs would forget all about this place in time, and about Hannibal, but would Will? Would wanting to forget be enough to make it happen?

Sadly, Hannibal glanced from the food still cooking in the oven to the place where Will had stood mere moments before. The abandoned wine glass, the plates, napkins and silverware on the counter. A waft of cold air drifted into the room because Will had left the house so hastily,

the door was wide open to the unforgiving new winter. And Hannibal was unforgiven, perhaps even unforgivable, but he was still in love.

Killing Will Graham would be easy; he could cover his tracks, ensure Jack Crawford never learned his true identity, keep himself safe. He could remove the love from his life like cutting out a tumor, but the phantom pain would never leave him. He poured both glasses of wine into the sink before he collapsed over it with a terrifying, heaving sob, the likes of which he had not heard himself let loose since childhood. It felt as if he'd been punched hard in the stomach and that he was going to vomit at the same time; it felt like Will Graham had destroyed him.

Bedelia had warned him against getting too close to Will, as if she sensed it would be his undoing, and as always she had been perfectly right. Still, he didn't care.

As his teardrops fell into the sink and glistened against the stainless steel, blurring his distraught expression, it occurred to Hannibal that this was the point of being in love, that his own well-being and precious autonomy had been rendered meaningless, as meaningless as it would be to murder Will. He had to get Will back, somehow, it did not matter how. He must think of something. His back shook with more shuddering convulsions of nauseating grief as his inability to evolve a specific plan of action unseated his pride. Will wasn't going to be in his bed tonight, holding Hannibal near, whispering sweet words of devotion, letting Hannibal keep dreaming of forever. He was gone.

Hannibal was alone again.

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"I know I didn't order you to stay away, but I would have thought it was self-explanatory," Will said a few days later when Hannibal showed up while he was fishing in the river back home in Wolf Trap.

He couldn't look at Hannibal, knowing he would still be *Hannibal,* gorgeous and brilliant, and his, always his, the one he still wanted when it was wrenching his ribcage open to squeeze his heart to bursting. So Will kept his eyes trained stubbornly on the cold river water and the cast of his rod, despite the fact that he could almost *hear* the pleading desperation in his former lover's face.

"You haven't turned me in," said Hannibal plainly. He remained a short distance away, petting the dogs who came up to sniff at him, then abandoned the greeting when they realized he hadn't brought them any snacks.

The fresh snap of the brisk day was enough to make the dogs more interested in scurrying about at play, their cheerful bustle a sharp contrast to the pain burrowing through the hearts of the two men at the river.

"It's been three days," Hannibal continued, "yet Jack Crawford has not arrived on my doorstep with handcuffs in hand. I have been waiting for the sirens. I can't help but be curious as to why you have allowed me to remain free."

“I haven’t decided what to do about you yet.” Will reeled back his line, feeling the absurdity of continuing to try and fish when Hannibal was here, ridiculously present despite every reason he should be keeping a distance and thanking his lucky stars he hadn’t been tossed in a jail cell yet.

“Why not? I would have thought the answer would be quite clear, since I am so disgustingly evil.” Hannibal squeezed his eyes shut and shook his head as Will’s eyes reluctantly landed on him at last. “I’m sorry, Will. For some reason, I keep saying the worst possible things.”

Hannibal looked drained, as if he hadn’t been sleeping. His coat was unbuttoned, which was foolish given the chill in the air. Will had to fight back the damnable instinct to go to him and button up his coat, say all was forgiven; how ludicrous. How dangerous, to love this man above his conscience, even his own safety. Yet he still believed what Hannibal had said to him, despite all the other words that had been careful lies: “you will always be safe with me.” Even now, he wasn’t afraid of Hannibal so much as himself and his own tendency to give in where the killer was concerned. Even learning he was the Ripper had not been enough to wrest the desire for submitting to his Hannibal out of Will’s miserable heart.

“You have always been my most formidable adversary,” Hannibal amended tenderly. He did not go to Will, who stood shivering slightly in his waders. It had been a rotten day for fishing, but he just wanted a distraction, no matter how useless. Hannibal did not go to him, but Will felt his words like the sweetest caress on his face; his skin ached and his body yearned.

“My sweet nemesis.” Hannibal smiled wistfully, his eyes full of unchanged adoration. His shirt beneath the coat was slightly wrinkled, and did not one hundred percent match his trousers. Were these tricks, designed to evoke Will’s sympathy to manipulate him? God, Will hoped so. He could take anything else at this point, aside from the Chesapeake Ripper’s sincere affection.

It’s like he’s a fan of you or something, Beverly had said.

And some part of his brain had itched when he felt pleasure in that suggestion, in thinking the Ripper knew him, wanted to entice him, had been showing off for him -- that they had been playing a game. The itch whispered that it wasn’t wrong, *don’t worry, sweet boy,* but only one person talked to him like that.

“You’re right, I did know the truth about you,” Will nodded. “I did lie to myself. I pushed it under the fever, and when it tried to resurface afterwards, I shoved it even deeper. Didn’t want to believe it. Maybe I still don’t.”

He clenched his jaw, gave Hannibal a flinty gaze full of scattershot, hazy green sea glass, and Hannibal looked appropriately wounded. It was almost offensive that the killer was behaving so honorably. He had given space, had waited to come, and even now that he was here, he did not impose. He held back his powerful influence, let Will draw his own conclusions even when they clearly left Hannibal fragile, nearly frail. All the ways Will never expected to see the Ripper, much less the sophisticated Dr. Hannibal Lecter. He had his own power, but he didn’t want it anymore...did he?

Will packed his gear, whistled for the dogs to follow, and made his way back home, Hannibal trailing him distantly.

“May I help you carry some of that?” Hannibal called, but Will shook his head.

“No, you may not.”

Once they were at his house, the dogs wandering languidly indoors, brushing past both their legs and bringing back memories of how they were almost a family, Will added coldly, “That’s how we get in trouble, you know. You, helping me as if it’s from the goodness of your heart; me wanting to believe it a little too much.”

Hannibal stood politely beside the beat-up old brown armchair in what sort of passed for Will’s living room. Buster ambled up onto the chair beside him and gave a curious whistle, staring at him as if he didn’t know if his trust in the man had vanished along with his master’s.

“Did you feel the shift happen, when I began caring for you out of my heart?” Hannibal tilted his head slightly to one side, almost clinical, although if he was trying to hide his vulnerable mood, he was doing a shitty job of it. “Surely you don’t believe everything between us has been a manipulative farce.”

“I thought it was the day you took me to lunch and we started talking about dating,” Will suggested.

He sat on the rug and began tinkering with a hopeless old boat motor he’d dragged in yesterday, another fruitless attempt at distraction; his hands kept busy but his heart wouldn’t stop hyper-focusing on memories with Hannibal, even as his mind fought to convince him to call Jack and put an end to this, see Hannibal behind bars for life. But he never reached for the damn phone.

“I don’t know what to think anymore.” Will turned the wrench with an almost painful jerk of his wrist, sending shimmers of rust to the floor in a cascade that almost made him cough. “You knew I was the likeliest to catch you, so it makes sense you’d want to keep your enemy close and all that. I imagine you must have considered framing me for your crimes if I started showing signs that I was about to report you to Jack -- the encephalitis would have made it easy, actually. Psychic driving, in addition to my illness, could have pushed me into madness so that I wouldn’t have even felt myself snapping until it was too late. Then you could have planted any evidence on me you wanted to save yourself.”

“For someone who claims to have had his eyes forcibly opened to me for the first time a few days ago, you certainly know me all too well, Will.” Hannibal looked from Will’s grumpy expression as the younger man continued his work, to the various stages of suspicion and interest on the dogs’ faces, and gave a martyr’s sigh. “I considered all of that, yes, of course I did. I have multiple plans in place to protect my identity at all times, and it only remains for me to choose the appropriate one if ever I feel a noose closing around my neck.”

“But you told me I was sick,” Will noted, gesturing at him with the wrench. “You told me *why* I was sick; I thought maybe it was just exhaustion, or I was finally going completely

insane, which for a long time I'd kind of thought would happen someday anyway. You knew that, but you brought me to get help."

"Because I fell in love with you. Yet the usefulness of the encephalitis in potentially framing you was not the only reason why I let you languish within its clutches so long."

Will stood, brushed the rust from his jeans, and flopped down in the wan beige chair; Buster settled beside him and Will stroked his head, distracted. "You're not going to ask if you can sit down?"

Hannibal smiled, gave a soft chuckle. "No, Will. I know the answer. There aren't any chairs in purgatory."

"Tell me why then," Will said, pushing past Hannibal's theatrics, knowing they came from an annoyingly acute, honest sadness that tugged on his own heartstrings. "Why did you leave me sick all that time?"

"When I was a boy, my parents took my younger sister and I to a church fair." Hannibal left a pause for Will to adjust to this first mention of his childhood and family, a subject he usually avoided at all costs. "I was perhaps five, and Mischa was only a toddler. My parents bought her a red balloon, and it was the brightest, sharpest color of red I had ever seen. I can still see it in my mind's eye. Of course, as many a toddler will do, she lost her grip on the string and the balloon floated up into the sky. It stood out, radiant, against the sun as the dark orange orb seemed to absorb it entirely. And to this day, I think it is one of the most beautiful things I have ever seen."

"I'm not a toy, Hannibal," Will sighed. He put his head in his hands and Buster nuzzled his leg, offering comfort.

"That was my mistake," Hannibal admitted, sinking to his knees beside Will but not daring to reach for him. "I thought I could love you and let you burn; I thought I could overcome my feelings for you. Instead, my love for you has consumed me. You're not the balloon. I am, and you are the sun. Can you ever forgive me, my love?"

"For being a murderer, or for lying to me about it and plotting to use my illness to frame me for said murders?" Will asked, sitting back and giving him a sullen glare. Still, his hands clung to the arm rests, his eyes were glazed in tears, and he knew he wasn't any better at fighting off his feelings than Hannibal was.

"Not for being a murderer. I'm not ashamed of who I am; far from it, I revel in every shade of my uniqueness. I see you, and I love you without reservation, with all of your strangeness and charm, all of the things you fear in yourself. All I wanted was for you to feel that for me in turn."

"You think I'm a killer by nature, just like you. What, did you think we'd be partners?"

"Yes, I hoped so. I've never met anyone before you who I considered a worthy partner."

Will tried not to let it show that this touched him, even tempted him. “How could we all stay here under Jack’s nose, with you and me taking victims left and right? And what about Abigail?”

Hannibal seemed a bit encouraged that Will wanted to know what his thought process had been regarding their future. That small light of hope in his eyes was crushing to Will because he felt morally obligated to douse it, more so than emotionally vengeful. God, he wished he was angrier, more repulsed by what Hannibal did. The truth was, he had always found beauty in the Ripper’s crimes, had found something there to which he reluctantly but powerfully related, connected. They had always been connected, a matched pair. It was only more vividly illuminated now, their oneness. And yet he had to keep them torn apart, or else what would he become?

“I thought we could take Abigail and simply leave this place,” Hannibal explained. “Go where we please. I had a dream of showing you Florence. It’s where I became a man, and there are places there so dear to my heart, I longed to share them with you. Abigail would love it too; I believed we would thrive in our new beginning. I’ve seen you blossoming, growing to love yourself, and I wanted to see that continue.”

Will pressed a hand to his lips to hold back an outright sob. “Why didn’t you just tell me from the beginning? I feel like a fool.”

“Will, it was only a matter of time before you discovered the truth. I was selfish; I didn’t know where that would leave me. I could only bring myself to leave possibilities to help you closer to the revelation. Simply saying it out loud was more than I could muster the strength for. Perhaps I was afraid you would look at me as you are now.”

“Don’t condescend to me, as if I can’t understand the great depth of your emotional landscapes, Hannibal, I’ve painted them, they’ve stained me. I understand, that’s -- that’s the problem. So you waited, because you were afraid if you chose the wrong moment, you might lose me?”

Hannibal sighed, stood and walked to the window, fidgeting with the curtains as Will had toyed with the boat motor. “I haven’t been afraid of losing someone since I was a child. And I lost her. Yes, Will, when it comes to the thought of losing you, I feel an emptiness inside that resembles complete dread, tantamount to fear.”

He kept his melancholy brown eyes trained on the flat, yellowed grass of Will’s yard, where the land was dappled in an early snow. Will watched him wrapping the curtain fabric around his fingers, and knew if he wanted to, he could yank the curtain down in a split second and use it to strangle Will. Instead, Hannibal allowed himself to be softly aching, needy and broken, like a sacrifice upon an altar devoted to Will.

It was just too damn hard, the way this made Will feel, the excruciating temptation to say all was forgiven, wrap Hannibal in a tight hug and let them cry it all out together until their tears were used up. Drag Hannibal to bed and love his body with ragged, desperate adoration until morning, deal with the consequences some other time.

But he was here, on the precipice of good and evil, fighting the decisive battle of his life. There was no in-between; Hannibal had made sure of it, insisted on it even knowing he might lose Will as a result. Still, Hannibal wanted to be loved for who he was, and there was something in that which Will admired, even aspired to. Most days, he only let himself want to be accepted for whoever he could make himself appear to be, the Good Will he showed the world, timid and unstable but well-intentioned. The real Will was still shy and sweet in certain ways, but he was darker, too, full of dangerous appetite, harboring razor-sharp antlers, capable of being happiest when drunk on pain and submission, but all-powerful in his hold over Hannibal. He was afraid of his real self, still didn't want to surrender.

And then there was the mortification, still fresh and stinging like an open wound, of how very intimate they had been, while Hannibal was wrapping his deception around Will. He leaned into that particularly savage flavor of hurt to help him stave off his immense longing.

"I feel empty thinking about how I told you everything about myself, and you told me next to nothing," Will admitted with a rough quiver in his voice. "I let you see all of me, and you *took* my deepest, most sensitive secrets, you let me...I even called you…"

Daddy, Will thought, unable to say the word out loud. It stung worse than ever, how he just wanted to collapse into Hannibal's welcoming embrace and sigh out for Daddy's love and protection. Worst of all, he knew he could have that, all he had to do was ask.

"Will, I'm deeply grateful for how you opened up to me; it's been the greatest honor of my life. I only wish you could see that I was equally--"

"No you weren't," Will insisted, "No, you *weren't.* You want to talk about childhood scars, try to make vague allusions to them as some kind of excuse for what you've done? Try this on for size, Doctor. You do know why people develop 'daddy issues,' right?"

"Will." Hannibal turned to lavish a deeply regretful, pained look at him, and Will only grew more indignant. Especially with the circles under Hannibal's beautiful eyes and the way his hair was much more unruly than usual, it was too much to take, as if he really did care.

"My father could never care enough for me to really bond, to give me any quality time beyond the basic necessities to ensure I kept going, stayed in good health, had what I needed to have to just exist." Will shrugged. "Maybe try and imagine how it feels to put some of those hurt emotions onto you and watch you sculpt them into this new happiness, let me call you *that* logically knowing why, what it must meant to me. And then you were lying to me the whole time, using me."

"I never used you." Hannibal's eyes flashed, spilled over, a tear trickling down his cheek. "Will. I have been in love with you from the first moment I--"

"Yeah, so you've said." Will gestured haphazardly to the door. "Please, I can't do this anymore. Please just go."

"Where?" Hannibal asked, pointlessly, almost ruthlessly in Will's opinion. How dare he place his fate in Will's hands, act as if he was lost without Will? It wasn't fair, it was so fucking

wrong that Will needed a new word to even attempt to describe it. Not manipulation...but brutal, merciless honesty. He didn't think he had the stomach for it.

"I don't have your appetite," Will forced himself to lie. "So you need to go somewhere else. Leave me alone, I don't…" He swallowed another hard, painful sob.

He couldn't make himself say 'I don't want you here.' Any other falsehood would have sufficed for the occasion, but that one just couldn't make it from his mind to his lips.

"Please just go?" he ended up saying weakly.

Hannibal ducked his head and left immediately, closing the door quietly behind him. Will cried and cried and sank to the floor as the dogs crowded around him and offered solace. He hugged them and wished there was an answer, or anything whatsoever in his life that made sense.

Chapter End Notes

More soon, and a turn into much happier times again 🥰

Wanna be missed

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The night Hannibal decided to move away was just like any other night since the break-up: colorless, tasteless, barren. He prepared a scrumptious sauté of Freddie Lounds' kidneys, achieving culinary perfection without even paying much attention to what he was doing. Really, it would not much have mattered if the meat burned to a crisp, since he barely touched it once he sat down to eat in his cobalt dining room which now felt uncannily empty. He had only the echo of Will's laughter as cold comfort, but the sound haunted him with memories of their happiness until his tears splashed into the savory sauce and he pushed the plate aside, rubbing his eyes, wondering when it was that the ability to cry had come back to his body with the strength of a freight train hitting him full-on.

He decided the only logical thing to do was have a few too many glasses of wine and binge on the remnants of Will's presence around the house. He left the bottle of tequila out on the kitchen counter, spent far too long slowly turning it, examining the glint of light off the dusky liquor, remembering how he'd slipped his thumb under Will's lips to catch an excess drop. Still, he could see them sitting in his bedroom, growing slightly tipsy on drink and each other, devouring each other with heady stares of admiration. He felt again the shy glances Will gave him when he undressed to fulfill the dare, and when he passed like a melancholy ghost into the study, he turned on his playlist of the songs they had danced to. While he had created the playlist as a planned future anniversary present, which he would present along with an extravagantly romantic dinner and the suggestion that they dance to their heart's content among the sacred joys of their memories, creating new ones with every heartbeat, now the collection of love songs was just another brick in the wall enclosing him into his grief.

The old Hannibal tried very hard to reassert himself, tell him to get over this nonsensical so-called "love," which had to be masochistic, even fatalistic, beneath him after all, and simply go on a good, long, harsh killing spree until he felt better. He ought to be at Will Graham's house right now with a knife in the boy's heart, not swallowing past a burning sob and *wallowing,* as if the bittersweet vintage of his despair was something worth savoring, if it was all he had left of Will.

Angry with himself, he threw his empty wine glass into the fireplace and watched the flames surge, engulfing his sad, large, nearly black eyes with a momentary flash of blindness. In that split second blackout, he saw nothing but Will's face, telling him to leave.

Well, perhaps that's just what he should do. He only wished the inspiration came to him as a righteous jolt of self-affirming resurrection, but it was more of a desperate attempt to give himself something else to do, anything. There was no enjoyment to be gained from killing hereabouts, knowing Will would read of his crimes with a continuous numb disappointment in the man he once loved. He would run away as he had when he was a teenager leaving Lecter Castle for the last time, stalking off through the snow, abandoning the whole mess of his vengeance and starting over. Surely, if he went far enough away, he could enjoy his life

again, the hunt -- both elegant and feral, rendering theatrical flourish to the deliciously grisly -- his other hobbies, the satisfactions of his ego, twisting and toying with those around him, caring for nothing but his own amusement. He could go far, far away from these tormenting memories and seal off the wing of his memory palace devoted to Will Graham. He could have himself back again.

He resolved to put his plan into action starting the next day; travel arrangements would be quite simple, since Will had thus far opted not to inform the authorities of his identity as the Ripper. It would be prudent to release Miriam Lass, with her moving stories of Frederick Chilton's gently nefarious prowess, to properly close off this saga of his life, which had once been one of his most entertaining periods. He envisioned this life as a shipwreck sinking into a sea of blood. *Good riddance to bad rubbish.* It held no further worth to him; he must leave it behind -- he understood starting over and reinvention perhaps better than any other process. He had wanted to see Will in its glorious flush, bursting from his chrysalis into the beautifully macabre triumph of his becoming, but Will did not understand. He did not See; he would not, for fear of being a monster like Hannibal.

Like the disappointing, embarrassing lovelorn fool he currently was, Hannibal changed from his carelessly thrown-on attire of the day into the pajamas he'd worn on the night of Will's first time sleeping in his bed. He took out his suitcase and packed a few necessities, reasoning he should slow down and think more clearly about this plan. Liquor slightly hazed his thoughts; he couldn't leave town within a day of releasing Miriam; it would look like running to anyone who was paying attention. But he wasn't sure he cared about common sense or preservation at present; perhaps part of him wanted to be caught and killed, or else placed behind bars to smolder relentlessly in dreams of Will's visitation, seeing his love like a merciful angel coming to him to murmur, *you let yourself become sloppy enough to be caught, out of love for me? Why?* A suitably angst-ridden fantasy, but at least in this one, Will looked at him, sorrowful and pitiful for his ordeal. Hannibal mused over the idea of being shot and killed by Jack Crawford, and of Will rushing to the scene to cradle his body, finally regretful for the way he had dismissed and rejected him. Crying over his corpse, cherishing the last warmth to leave his lifeless form, yes...the vision had a certain morbid comfort to it.

He went to the closet and grabbed a handful of Will's suits that hung in his own special place which Hannibal had made for him, to hold the wardrobe he had custom made for his beautiful boy. Rubbing his face into the sleeves seemed a wonderful way to spend a few stolen moments of gluttonous, if hollow pleasure, inhaling the scent of Will's cologne, fire amber and tobacco vanilla, a simple but beguiling concoction which Hannibal had also ordered made for his lover, something to replace the Old Spice but maintain Will's personality through an intoxicating, spicy-sweet but subtle scent.

It was difficult to say how long he lingered in such mundanely human practices, going through the stages of grief as if he was some common, merely mortal dolt and not the terrifying Ripper, the intimidating Dr. Lecter, above this pathetic conduct. He finally fell asleep unintentionally, his body sinking helpless into exhaustion, one of Will's shirts clutched in his arms as he curled up on the bed beside the suitcase, trying to summon Will to him, imagining that he lay in Will's lap, dead and ecstatic to be held once again, to be missed, to *know* he was grieved, that he had left a hole in Will's heart to match the one in his own.

A thunderstorm began outside, as he slept too deeply to care, rocked like a baby in the arms of his meandering fantasies of Will's forgiveness and love.

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Will couldn't sleep that night, especially not when a violent thunderstorm laid siege to the skies, shaking the walls of his little house so that he imagined himself soon being swept away, yanked from the roots of his supposedly moralistic existence like Dorothy crashing down in Oz, shoved from his self-inflicted dreary world, the black-and-white doldrum of it all, to full color spectacle. He loved the way the storm sounded, the rain pelting his windows and slicking everything for miles, the lightning crackling across the black skies.

Going to the front window, he watched the rain attacking the ground, fast torrents actually bouncing from the grass and mud as soon as they struck, too wild to find satisfaction in anything other than an assaulting, possessive devouring. *Beautiful,* he thought, wistfulness sinking into his heart such as he hadn't felt -- or allowed himself to feel -- since the day he left Hannibal. This storm, so relentless, selfish, hedonistic and gorgeously wild, it spoke to him, tangling his memories of loving Hannibal with those he held of the Ripper's murder tableaus, viscious incisions, missing organs to fill a decadent dinner table, powerful homages to art and beauty cultivated like gorgeous flowers out of the dirt which was the discourteous pigs of the world. There was no difference between Hannibal and the Ripper; there never had been. There was only the man who was the monster, who had fallen in love against his every instinct of self-preservation and haughty egotism, who had knelt before him defeated, supplicating, only to be turned away.

He seemed to understand Hannibal's reasons for lying, in a way he had not considered them before. As he watched the rain pounding the earth and streaking his window, making the trees sway harshly in a bitter wind, he thought of how terrifying it must have been for this great and terrible beast hiding in elegant indifference to *need* someone. The mistakes Hannibal had made in result...were they forgivable? He knew he was not dwelling on resenting Hannibal's murderous activities or cannibalistic depravity as he should. From the first moment the pieces came together in his understanding, the merge of Hannibal and the Ripper, he knew to his own moral failure, it wasn't the killing nor the cannibalism that hurt him, disappointed him, broke his heart. It was feeling used, realizing he'd been lied to countless times, allowed himself to be fully vulnerable while Hannibal hid behind an armor of deception.

But had Hannibal been hiding, truly, when they danced, or kissed and touched each other so passionately, had he been hiding in their fragile new domestic bliss or their shared affection and protectiveness of Abigail? He bit his lip and stared into the rain, watching lightning shatter the sky so it seemed to tear in two before his eyes. *No.* He knew it was all real. He had seen Hannibal in his home just a few days previous, essentially begging for his forgiveness and love, something that must have been an absolutely excruciating ordeal to the killer's pride. That was shockingly vulnerable; yet in his own fear he had not offered acceptance.

Everything was suddenly so clear, so obvious. From behind him on their cushions the dogs roused and began barking in fear of the storm, and his face softened from reflective decision to gentle caretaking.

“Shh, it’s okay,” Will soothed. He patted his cheeks, almost perpetually tear-streaked since Hannibal’s departure. The crying didn’t feel like grieving anymore, more like baptismal tears, the holy water of his love come to save him from his own misery-invoking would-be conscience, never better than a pained facade.

As he knelt to pet them, the dogs looked to him as they always did, for answers to whatever occurred, and now what was occurring was a brutally magnificent storm. He knew what to do.

“C’mon, let’s go for a drive.”

Winston looked at him like he’d gone crazy, but Will laughed warmly. “It’s okay, boy, we’re going home. It’s all going to be okay.”

The road, he reasoned, was at least as safe in these conditions as a small, rustic farmhouse with a roof that had seen better days. He ran through the rain to his car and the dogs hopped in, most of them seeming grateful for the escape. To them, it probably seemed that they could simply drive away from the storm, but in every way that mattered, he was driving right into it for the first time in his life.

It was a difficult drive on wet roads, but Will was very careful, completely focused on making it there in one piece, and keeping the dogs safe as well. It killed him to drive slowly when his heart was so hurried, but he often had to when otherwise he would have skidded off the road. As it was, the drive took longer than usual, and he thanked God the dogs had fallen asleep finally, since it was late and they’d worn themselves out worrying about the lightning.

He had been doing the same for far too long -- wearing himself down to the bone with apprehensions about a murky future, foreseeing a painful existence, dragging himself through life sacrificing his every true inclination for the facade of a moral fortitude which had never granted him any real comfort. He was done pretending now; he needed Hannibal, needed to tell him now, tonight, exactly how he felt, what he wanted for them -- maybe most of all how he was sorry and why. His heart pounded when he finally pulled into his ex-lover’s driveway.

Oh, God, he almost panicked -- what if Hannibal couldn’t forgive *him,* what if it was too late? What if he’d ruined everything they had with his stubbornly idiotic ethics?

Never mind Good Will, he decided; there was nothing good about him, he saw that now, and he’d never felt more free.

He let the dogs sleep for the time being and rushed to the front door, steeling himself for a possible rejection although his heart sang with excitement at the same time. It was an adrenaline rush; he realized he must look insane, that he was rain soaked and still wearing his red plaid pajamas, his curls glued to his forehead as he shivered. He just didn’t care; it didn’t matter. Hannibal loved him and he was here -- he had gotten here, finally, in a lightning-fierce flash of sudden inspiration, life-changing revelation.

He rang the doorbell.

“What on earth are you doing here?” Hannibal asked, quietly astonished when he answered the door.

Will was silent; for a few breathless moments he stared at Hannibal, his chest heaving, vivid blue eyes huge with emotion too overwhelming for mere words.

“You had better come inside,” Hannibal said crisply, mildly aggravated and definitely very sleepy, as if he’d been roused from the first slumber he had stolen in days. He guided Will inside by his shoulders, then paused in the foyer to ask about the dogs.

“They’re asleep in the car, I’ll get them,” Will answered, still in a bit of a daze. He was dripping all over Hannibal’s perfect floor, but the killer made no complaint. “I wasn’t sure you’d let me in.”

“How absurd of you to think such a thing,” Hannibal replied.

His wan features seemed to telegraph the message to Will that he refused to attach hope to his presence; he could not stand another disappointment, but he wasn’t going to leave Will to drown in the rain either.

“I will get the dogs settled indoors,” Hannibal decided. “Please, go into the laundry room and take those wet clothes off before you catch cold, put them in the wash. It will be a miracle if you haven’t already made yourself ill. Take this.”

He uncorded his debonair, velvety maroon bathrobe and handed it to Will, who smiled and took it, stars in his eyes. Hannibal looked at him as if he found this behavior distinctly strange, and then the killer put on his adorable raincoat and did his cutely pert little prance-run to the car to extract the pack of former strays and guide them into the house. Will watched him for a few moments, smirking at his typically adroit, yet ever-classy antics, then he obeyed Hannibal’s edict regarding his dripping attire.

Once the dogs were settled back down to sleep in the study, Hannibal found Will in the laundry room, dropping his sopping plaid pajamas into the washer. He had tossed on the wonderful robe -- it was soft and warm, and it smelled gloriously of Hannibal.

Hannibal’s mouth tensed as he paused in the doorway, clad in the same endearing white pj’s he’d worn the night of their ‘slumber party.’ His hair was sleep-mussed, softly sweeping down over his brow; his golden-brown eyes shone with mingled disbelief and reluctant surrender. He took in the sight of Will wearing nothing but his robe as if it physically pained him.

“I can hardly believe you would drive in such weather,” he said, transparently relying on sternness to conceal his overwhelmed state.

“It was the storm that made me realize,” Will said. He sighed into a shaky smile, caught between hopes and fears. But here it was, their moment. He mustn’t falter now.

Hannibal watched the raindrops still spilling from Will’s curls and shook his head sternly. He took a towel from a nearby basket of clean laundry and began rubbing Will’s hair dry.

“What did it make you realize?” Hannibal asked, lowering the towel. His accent had gone thick and his words nearly indecipherable as English, the way it did when Will’s nearness was especially heart-rending.

“This,” Will breathed, stepping forward to wrap his arms around Hannibal’s neck and press a hot kiss to his lips. It only took a moment for Hannibal to accept that this was real, and then he melted against Will, pulled his body tight to his own and claimed his lips with desperate fervor.

Again and again, fast and dizzying, then hard and deep they kissed, soft lips crushing rough enough to bruise, tongues tangling, teeth clashing, until they had no choice but to pull apart to breathe.

“You’re my storm,” Will murmured, kissing his neck, biting hard enough to claim and make Hannibal growl. “My beast, my force of nature. I don’t want you to change, I just want you, and to be yours.” He took Hannibal’s hand and pressed it to his heart, ferociously slamming his ribcage in a cacophony of elation. “Can you feel it?”

“Yes,” Hannibal moaned raggedly.

He swept Will off his feet and sat him on the dryer, then they resumed kissing, Will’s legs locked around Hannibal’s hips, the robe falling open to Hannibal’s hungrily roving hands.

His delicious, all-knowing hands were all over Will, fast, reckless, groping his biceps, his chest and hips, squeezing his thighs, knuckles brushing over Will’s erection so that Will moaned into their kiss, “I love you.” His curls were grabbed and tugged, his lips taken again with ardent gasps; his hips rocked into Hannibal. Will’s body and soul were dependent on Hannibal’s every whim, an entire symphony of happiness evoked effortlessly by the older man’s natural outburst of love.

Will closed his eyes and struggled to breathe; his heart was a fierce drumbeat under an ocean of pleasure. Hannibal was kissing and biting his way down Will’s body, sumptuous lips pulling on sensitive nipples, palming Will’s cock, touching him so perfectly, summoning waves of ecstasy that crashed over him, a dark baptism, clarity of purpose, he was living for this, for Hannibal, for them, heart to heart, minds conjoined. Will stroked his fingers lovingly through Hannibal’s silky hair as his lover licked his cock, still playing with his nipples, flicking the pebbled nubs while his tongue laved up and down Will’s hot, thick length and swirled around the tip with a delighted hum of approval that sent lovely vibrations shimmering through him.

“Oh, God,” Will gasped; he could feel the warm, gently rocking motion of the dryer underneath him adding to the intensity of sensation.

Hannibal sucked on his balls, stroking him, then biting his upper thigh. He seemed so distracted by every inch of Will he longed to devour, and the continual feasting, the claiming of Will’s flesh with such ravenous obsession, it was enough to ensure Will’s cock twitched and released more precum, easing the glide when Hannibal resumed stroking him. This was so dangerous and wrong; the killer he loved showing him how to love the killer in himself,

how to be whole, alive, let go of every fear and regret. Will was on the other side of the looking glass now; wrong was so perfectly *right*.

Hannibal had never been so beautiful, his sharp cheekbones and plush lips ever entrancing, his silky pajamas clinging to his muscular frame as Will's hips shuddered helplessly and he plunged himself deeper into the hot, tight heaven of that mouth, capable of such taboo, unthinkable sins. The monster who ripped others to shreds and ate them in a savagely elegant ceremony of greed, this was Will's monster, completely devoted to him, sinking Will's cock so deep, swallowing him whole. Will convulsed with a loud cry that made Hannibal smile when he pulled his mouth off, panting, looking up at the younger man with his eyes glowing, endearing tears of exertion revealing his worship, his lips red and swollen.

"I'm so close," Will whimpered, feeling the pleasure inside him suddenly paused while teetering over climax, a breath away from a shattering orgasm. "So close… ohhh...hurts...don't stop."

"The pleasure hurts when it's close enough to taste, then taken away from you," said Hannibal raspily. "And you are devastatingly gorgeous like this, Will, right on the very knife's edge." He dragged a finger from Will's neck down his chest and stomach, then murmured in his ear, "You're not going to come yet, baby. You'll wait until I tell you to, won't you?"

"Yes," Will nodded desperately, delighted at the discipline and structure, intoxicated by the strain of deprivation, the excitement of wondering how hard he was going to come once he had permission. "Daddy?"

Hannibal looked down at him, momentarily bereft. As if he had not expected to be called this again. Will's heart hurt to see his hesitant resurgence of hope, and he hugged Hannibal close, wrapped his arms and legs around him possessively. "Can I still call you Daddy?"

"Please," Hannibal choked out, narrowly fighting back a sob. "Yes, please, baby."

"My Daddy," Will sighed, his lips hot against Hannibal's warm, beautiful skin. He kissed and bit, nuzzled in to scent the killer's skin and show reciprocal animal ferocity in this taking that was giving at the same time. "I missed you so, so much. I need you so bad."

Hannibal kissed his lips, more languorous and searching this time, less of stealing every sweetly crushing collision of mouths as if it might be the last. "I've always been yours, Will."

He picked Will up again, no real challenge since Will was clutched so tightly around him, holding on for dear life. Then he brought Will into the bedroom and laid him down. Still blinking back tears, Hannibal went to a large suitcase which had occupied the bed before Will, and put it away, slid it under the bed like hiding a bad memory he never wanted to revisit.

"What was that?" Will demanded tenderly, grabbing Hannibal's shirt collar when his lover hovered above him caressing his face, staring down at him in thunderstruck wonderment. "You were packing up, leaving here?"

“I found myself unable to kill you, and unable to be so close without touching you, breathing your breath, pouring my love out for you in every way I possibly can. I don’t know what it would have done to me, staying here, perhaps hearing of you eventually finding love again with someone else--” Hannibal closed his eyes, submitting to the soft brush of Will’s fingers over his cheek where uncharacteristic stubble had been allowed to grow in during the killer’s long days of sadness in Will’s absence.

“Don’t ever leave,” Will cried, tears spilling down his cheeks. This time, Hannibal kissed every single one away, as Will told him with throaty insistence, “I’m so sorry, so sorry, please. Can you forgive the things I said? I was afraid of myself, not you, but now I know we’re lost without each other. I can’t be without you ever again.”

“There’s nothing for me to forgive,” Hannibal assured him, “It was my own fault for lying to you when I knew perfectly well I was lost forever into your hands, the second our eyes met in Jack’s office that first day. Still, with such wrong-headed defiance, I tried to tell myself I was stronger than love, I could treat you with the same cold mischief I’ve bestowed on others. I hurt you out of foolish pride and later fear of losing you, then when I finally brought myself to tell you the truth, I dropped it on you like a bomb while telling myself it was subtle, gentle -- all I have been able to see during your absence is the way you looked at me when you realized how I had returned your openness with a locked door, then expected you to immediately accept everything on the other side. I did not give you a chance to hear it properly, given freely, without artifice. Will.” He pressed their foreheads together. “I will never lie to you again.”

“I know that,” Will assured him. “I know it, love.” The word made Hannibal smile, wistfulness defeating his collapse into miserable reminiscence. “You thought no one could love the monster in you, but let me show you how much I do. The way you’ve shown me all along, despite the lies, you never failed to let me know I was appreciated, seen, and adored.” He laced their fingers together, then guided Hannibal to pin him to the mattress. “I’m still yours. And the next time you take out that suitcase, it’s going to be because we’re leaving for Florence.”

Chapter End Notes

I do love a rainsoaked Will, it's all those Mizumono vibes! More soon, and we'll be picking up directly from where this chapter left off 😉

This love asylum, like an island...

“Alright, my darling?” Hannibal asked, his voice huskily strained with the exertion of restraint. He lay between Will’s shaking thighs, gently rocking a bit deeper inside his beautiful boy, moaning softly as he pressed kisses to Will’s sweaty brow.

Will couldn’t form words; he was too overpowered by pleasure such as he’d never fathomed. If he could speak, he would have said, *I’m wonderful. You’ve been so careful with me, love. You spent so long getting me ready. It doesn’t hurt at all, this is the happiest moment of my life.*

But he lost his breath on another of Hannibal’s deepening thrusts, the long, slick glide of his rigid and thick cock now sinking in another inch, almost all the way. Hannibal looked down at him in concern, one hand cupping Will’s face as the other tenderly stroked his trembling leg. Will nodded, it was all he could do; a cry built up inside him when Hannibal pressed deep enough to nudge his prostate, sending tendrils of warm, sweet pleasure resonating through his body.

The cry came out as a soft whimper although he had tried to bite it back, old instinct making him shy. Yet in such a completely intimate moment, there was no room for his bashful fear of his own excessive sensitivity and the noises it brought out of him. The sounds *Hannibal* drew from his lips so easily, simply by being himself, adoring and gorgeous.

It had been so important to Hannibal that Will wasn’t hurt by this the first time. The foreplay had gone on for what seemed like hours with the killer’s hot breath pouring over his ass, his tongue lapping languidly, Hannibal exhaling sighs of praise, scissoring Will with strong, careful fingers, opening him so beautifully that Will hadn’t been afraid in the least. In fact, he kept disintegrating in needy, euphoric pleasure, and Hannibal put him back together each time, saying “Not yet, darling, I have so much more to give you tonight.”

Then Hannibal took himself in hand, pumped himself with a pleasured shudder, his bulging cock looking so extravagantly big Will should be gulping in apprehension. Instead, all he felt was joy and the delirium of completion, Hannibal inside of him, the two of them joined at last as one. It had been messy, messier than any sex Will had experienced, and so much more passionate. Fingers intertwined, bodies rocking together sticky and sweaty, his ass loosened and dripping with Hannibal’s saliva, and still he felt no shame in the intensity of this undertaking, the naked, total exposure, the earth-shaking vulnerability of it.

He’d been moaning all along, but now he nearly screamed with the divine rocking of Hannibal’s hips into him, the way he was filled up, love all around and inside him, his senses singing with the scent of them together, their body heat and cologne blended, Hannibal gazing down at him in amazement, gasping and saying his name hoarsely, his golden eyes half-hidden behind a loose fringe of silvery hair. The gentle lamplight shimmering off Hannibal’s pale eyelashes, the taste of his lover’s mouth on his own, the rhythm of his tongue moving deeper inside, matching the powerful thrusts of his cock that were beginning to pick up speed.

“It’s good, isn’t it, my dear?” Hannibal muttered hot against his ear before he broadly licked it, and Will whined out a halted, astonished, “*Yes!*”

“Then show me, let me see you completely, hear every feeling flooding you when we are like this, knowing nothing can part us ever again.” Hannibal pressed their foreheads together and treated Will to several deep thrusts, powerfully stimulating his prostate, and Will clung to him, his nails scoring thin red scrapes down Hannibal’s back which the killer bore with a happy shudder. He let out a bone-deep moan and Hannibal smiled approvingly.

“I’ll always take care of you, mylimasis. Would you like that?”

“Yes, yes, please, Daddy,” Will begged, “Please, I need more.”

“I’m yours, Will. You may have anything and everything you want.” Hannibal kissed him, roved a hand through his curls and held on tightly, fucked him harder than he had so far, and Will gave a high, keening cry.

Hannibal groaned in pleasure and pinned Will’s wrists down, riding him fast, hard and deep. “The first time I saw you,” he said breathlessly, “I wanted to make love to you all night long.”

Tears squeezed from Will’s big blue eyes as his mouth hung open in disbelief at the sensations Hannibal wrought from his trembling, blossoming body. He couldn’t even remember what it felt like to be lonely, to hate himself, to think his soul was ugly.

“I was awful to you,” Will remembered in shock, and Hannibal smiled resplendently.

“You were so beautiful in my eyes.” Hannibal pulled out of Will with a ragged sigh and guided him to turn over onto his hands and knees. He stroked Will’s ass, then slowly reentered him, one hand tight on Will’s hip and the other grazing over his nipples.

Will let out a sharp mewl at the depth and naughtiness of the new position. He glanced at Hannibal over his shoulder, and the older man looked so decadently handsome and wicked, he shivered in response. “Oh, God, more, please.”

“The second time we met,” Hannibal resumed in a tight voice, gliding in sweet, long thrusts in and out of Will’s body, grunting intermittently at the hot, slick clutch of his lover. “I wanted to fuck you.”

Will flashed back to the dim motel room, the way Hannibal’s eyes had flitted over his tired face, mussed hair and tight little t-shirt and boxers. How could he have not known, right then, that the attraction between them was building like kindling touched to a lit match, that the flames would inevitably engulf them, bring them to this unbelievably perfect moment?

“God, oh, God,” Will cried, his voice going staccato in time with Hannibal’s deliciously rough, fast, deep thrusts.

Hannibal spanked him briskly, and exulted in a hoarse tone, “You’re such a good boy for Daddy, Will. I want you to come for me now.”

Will quivered in ecstasy at the combined affirmation and control, the thrill of how they fit together, his body easily taking in Hannibal's thick, glorious cock, learning all the things he wanted that he never knew he *needed* so badly before meeting this incomparable man.

He thought he probably would have come merely from the way Hannibal was pounding his prostate, growling and biting his shoulder, claiming him so beautifully, but the older man reached for Will's cock and began stroking him with expert skill. Will was never happier than when in Hannibal's strong, loving hands, being shown what to do, his formerly half-dead heart coming alive in Hannibal's care until he was glowing with delight.

"Mmm, God, so good," Will moaned, "Daddy, please don't stop."

Hannibal smiled against Will's sweaty skin and pumped him several more times until the younger man spilled all over his fingers. He gripped Will's hip and fucked him through the orgasm so that the waves of pleasure lasted longer than Will knew they even could. He felt Hannibal burst within him moments later on a heady gasp, heard an impressive string of curses in various languages falling from Hannibal's lips as he rode out his own release, filling the room with the wet smack of skin, the harmony of their sighs and moans as Will's heartbeat pounded through his ears.

"Are you really back to stay?" Hannibal asked a few minutes later as they lay tangled up together, Will nuzzling into his chest hair and leaving kisses across his pectorals, then moving his lips up to Hannibal's neck, chuckling softly.

"Of course I am."

He raised his eyes to Hannibal's gaze, finding his lover a bit nervous again, still shivering in the resonating afterglow of their mind-blowing sex, still breathing a little heavier than usual as they both were. But Hannibal hadn't been able to wait to have this conversation; he was riddled with his own nagging, overwhelmed questions, and he resumed speaking as soon as he could summon reasonably cogent breath.

"Don't you believe me?" Will asked, teasing and serious all at once, a unique blend that drove Hannibal wild for him.

"How can I believe what defies common sense on every level?" Hannibal stroked a hand through Will's curls with obsessive attentiveness, and Will melted into his touch with a smile. "After my games and deception--"

"I don't care about that anymore, as long as you don't do it again, to me -- not ever," Will warned him with a wink, his eyes sparkling too much for Hannibal to worry about his lingering insecurities and regret.

"My beautiful, special boy," Hannibal praised, "I don't want anything between us ever again. Not games, nor lies, nor any attempt on my part to remain above the way I feel for you. That was a foolish, doomed ploy on my part whereby I hurt no one more than myself."

"I want us like this," Will smiled, pulling their bodies flush together, sighing at the sexy, exciting feeling of them skin to skin. "Closer than close, everything we need."

“My love.” Hannibal held him close and petted through his hair again, then massaged his back, his words warm and so sincere compared to the smooth, manipulative way he spoke to others. He was so different with Will. “I’m sure you still have questions.”

“Many,” Will admitted. He drew back just enough to cup Hannibal’s face, rubbing a thumb over his sharply elegant cheekbone. “I’m sorry that I interrupted you so much the day you came to me, to apologize. I was still very angry and hurt.”

“As you had every right to be.”

“Yeah, I know. But you were trying to tell me something about your sister, and I just couldn’t handle it. I didn’t want to believe anything you were saying was true.”

“It was all true,” Hannibal told him. “I often try to convince myself that my origins have nothing to do with my current proclivities. But there is a deep pain in me from childhood that never healed. I would never tell anyone else of this. I cannot believe the words are leaving my lips, even now.”

“It’s safe with me, we can talk about it anytime you need to. About Mischa.”

“Thank you, Will.” He kissed Will’s forehead. “I think that’s all I have the strength to say on the subject tonight. But perhaps someday…”

“I’ll be here,” Will assured him. He scanned Hannibal’s softly happy but deeply tired features, noticing the redness in his eyes from crying. “Hey, you’re exhausted, huh?”

“I didn’t think you were coming back,” Hannibal admitted, nearly starting to weep again, blushing as if embarrassed. He broke eye contact and muttered something in Lithuanian.

“What?” Will prompted gently, stroking his face, kissing his cheek, playing with his soft, silky hair.

“I thought I had lost you forever, mylimasis. I have not slept much at all since the day you left. This hasn’t been home without you. I’ve felt like a ghost.”

“Sleep now,” Will soothed him, “You’re safe, you’re home with me, and I love you.”

“What if I wake to find this is nothing but a dream? I can stay awake a little longer,” Hannibal murmured drowsily. He yawned, and Will thought adoringly, *what a big baby.*

“C’mon,” Will laughed sweetly, rolling onto his side and pulling at Hannibal to curl up behind him. “Be my big spoon. This isn’t a dream.”

“Promise me?” Hannibal asked, wrapping a warm arm around Will’s middle and tucking his face into his lover’s neck, breathing him in, a fix more necessary than oxygen.

“I promise,” Will vowed, feeling pretty damn worn-out himself, between the late hour, very yummy physical exertion, and his emotions rushing through him like ecstatic wildfire. He drifted off to the sounds of Hannibal’s cute, quiet snores which followed soon after.

***

The next day was Saturday, with no rude alarm to prevent them sleeping until ten, wrapped snugly together.

Will woke to the lovely feeling of warm lips pressed to his neck while an impressive erection slowly, deliberately rocked against his ass. He moaned and kept his eyes closed while Hannibal bit and sucked on his neck, making his own cock jerk all on its own, always rock hard in the morning and even more alert than usual under Hannibal's attentions.

"I'm quite insatiable in the morning, Will," Hannibal said, the sound of his desire-thickened accent making Will moan louder, his lashes fluttering as Hannibal's hand found him, big and hard and *so* sensitive, under the sheets.

"Ohhh," Will whimpered when Hannibal gave his cock a few too-gentle and tentative strokes.

"So sensitive," Hannibal marveled, "So responsive for Daddy. I think you could come just from this, but it would take a long time, wouldn't it, darling?"

"Mmm, please give me more, Daddy," Will begged shamelessly. He opened his eyes and clasped Hannibal's face behind him, drawing him into a messy, deep kiss. "Fuck me."

Hannibal kissed Will delirious with passion, then did just as his equally insatiable boy had asked. He pressed Will firmly to the sheets and kissed, licked and bit down his body with sweet fervor.

"You're my breakfast in bed," Hannibal smiled teasingly, and Will's eyes rolled up as Hannibal spread his thighs and began eating him out while he stroked Will's cock.

The combined sensations, especially because Hannibal was rimming him with such wet, sloppy enthusiasm, were too much for Will to bear for very long without release. "I'll never make it if you keep doing that," he gasped, "You're so good, Hannibal, oh my God--"

"Am I?" Hannibal asked mischievously. He rose back up to lay a sultry kiss on Will's neck, sliding a finger inside him with lazy motions but precise knowledge of exactly how to make Will go even more insane with the need to be filled and taken hard. "Am I really?"

"You're so good, and so bad," Will pouted. "You're mine, and I want you to show me." He knew he was playing with fire, so he batted his eyelashes and said with his plush lips still red from last night's excessive kisses, "Please?"

"You know how Daddy loves to spoil his naughty little angel," Hannibal smiled indulgently. He spent only a few more minutes rocking his fingers into Will's body, finding his lover was still slightly relaxed from the night before. "So beautiful, Will, inside and out."

"I want you inside me," Will whispered, an obvious plea but no less precious to Hannibal.

Soon Hannibal was seated deep inside him, fucking Will with luxurious care, pumping his cock in and out of Will's pleasure-addled body, and neither of them could handle it quietly.

Anytime they weren't moaning so loudly the walls seemed to shake, they were kissing, deep and hard as Hannibal's thrusts. Will's leg was flung over Hannibal's shoulder, their eyes locked as the killer took him all the way to another shocking orgasm that made a full-body tremble take him over, a silent cry of astonishment leaving his mouth hanging open. Hannibal bit his ankle, then kissed and licked at his foot as he fucked Will until he came copiously inside him, planting his hand hard on Will's throat, squeezing just a little. Just enough for Will to remember where he had found his love and pleasure, in the arms of danger. He had to let himself go crazy to *be* himself, to find his joy.

Now he was beet red, still shaky and bright-eyed, and Hannibal much the same. "I could get used to being woken up like that," he smirked.

"It's far preferable to an alarm clock," Hannibal replied blithely.

Will lay flat on his back and Hannibal hovered over him, trailing his hands over the sculpted planes of Will's body, down to the tiny softness in his low belly, still marveling at every inch of him, still fascinated by Will's breathless reactions to his slightest ministration of pleasure. They could take this so far together, and they would.

"You've been planning another sounder," Will announced out of nowhere; his sudden remark only made Hannibal arch his brows and smile playfully.

"How did you know?"

"I can read your face," Will explained, caressing his cheek as Hannibal leaned into his touch and kissed his fingers. "You're my favorite story and I'm getting to know you by heart. Freddie Lounds was the first in this sounder; there will be two more victims."

"Have you any guesses as to their identity?"

"Oh, Dr. Sutcliffe, I don't doubt." Will brushed Hannibal's hair from his brow with a loving smile. "They're all presents for me, aren't they, love? People who have offended me."

"Yes, clever boy." Hannibal looked so immensely proud and pleased that Will discerned his plans with instinctive ease.

"Frederick Chilton?"

"I need Dr. Chilton for another purpose," Hannibal clarified, "Otherwise, he would certainly be the third. The disrespectful way he has spoken to you in the past is unforgivable, but rest assured he will suffer appropriately."

"Good," Will approved darkly, deeply resenting the man for mocking him and not-so-subtly suggesting Will was an embarrassing lunatic. "Who will be third, then?"

"I thought perhaps Jack Crawford, given his propensity to use you so insensitively for his own ends, then show you off like a prize pony in front of the department."

"Oh, I don't want to kill Jack," Will frowned, "I know he has his flaws, but he's been good to me too."

Hannibal looked at him sternly, and Will's frown melted into a giggle. "Really! He's been like a --"

"Please tell me you weren't going to say 'like a father,'" Hannibal cut him off, getting even sterner, and consequently even sexier.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean it like that," Will said as seriously as he could. However, his smothered laughter got the best of him and he let out a snort in spite of himself.

"Indeed?" Hannibal snipped, definitely more charmed and aroused by Will's mischief than he was angry, but there was a slight undercurrent of possessive frustration that made Will's cock give an unexpected twitch.

Jesus, Will hadn't realized he could get it up twice in one morning, but when it came to Hannibal--

"Are you literally going to ask me who my daddy is?" Will smirked, getting himself into deeper trouble on purpose.

Hannibal's eyes were dark with sultry aggravation. "You obviously want a spanking, Will. Rest assured that with this behavior, you are certain to get one."

"What?" Will feigned soft, boyish surprise, causing Hannibal to growl, and the next thing he knew he'd been flipped over while Hannibal lavished a perfect, blissfully painful spanking on the soft curves of his ass, turning his skin from pink to red.

Will moaned out, "Daddy, Daddy," as Hannibal dragged his once again rigid cock between Will's ass cheeks. One sound, relentless fucking later, Will was slightly worried he wouldn't be sitting comfortably anytime soon, but the huge grin on his face said he didn't mind a bit.

***

"This is completely delicious," Will enthused at breakfast, sitting as gingerly as possible on the cushioned chair at Hannibal's -- *their* dining room table.

And he wasn't lying -- the fluffy omelette, delectable with goat cheese and mushrooms, was exactly what he needed to finish waking up. There was perfectly tart, fresh-squeezed orange juice, thick-cut bacon glistening enticingly, and a nice big, steaming mug of Hannibal's french-pressed coffee. Hannibal's pajama pants were Will's only attire, and Hannibal's lovestruck expression was even better than the food -- which was really saying something.

It was honestly more like lunch, since it was past twelve. Will loved that they had gotten so carried away, loved the way Hannibal had treated him to lavish aftercare, tending to him in the wake of the spanking with a soothing bath and the application of some kind of wonderful salve that left his slightly sore skin tingling pleasantly. He loved that Hannibal took so much joy in cooking for him, watching Will's reactions when he tasted the food, caring so greatly if the things he did brought Will pleasure and happiness.

"Shall we take the dogs for a walk after this?" Hannibal inquired, and Will nodded.

“I’d love that. It’s a beautiful day for a walk.” The merest glance out the nearby windows showed a lovely, if cold day, with a sunny, bright blue sky left in the wake of the stormy night.

“First,” Will resumed, nibbling on his toast, then taking a sip of coffee as he considered how to broach this next question, “I want you to tell me about Miriam Lass.”

Again, Hannibal’s surprise at his random inquiry was minimal. “She’s alive, in one of my safehouses,” he revealed. “She believes herself to have been kidnapped and held prisoner by Frederick Chilton.”

“How long has *that* plan been in motion?” Will asked, his brow furrowing, wheels turning in his head.

“All along, since the day I took her,” Hannibal explained, moving the food around on his plate with his fork, aware of Will watching him in curiosity.

He looked up at Will, finally, ceasing his fidgeting and taking the matter head-on. “You must know I never intended to allow you to take the blame for my crimes permanently. It was always going to be Frederick.”

Will flashed a complicated, brief smile. “It’s good to know that.”

Still, he couldn’t help thinking how close he had come to the horror of public shaming, infamously being labeled the Chesapeake Ripper, given over into Chilton’s “care” until Hannibal saw fit to turn the tables and free him again. Until Hannibal felt it was safe to allow Will out into the world, that he had learned his lesson about trifling with the killer.

“Mylimasis.” Hannibal tossed the napkin from his lap onto the table and went to Will, going on his knees before him.

Will sighed, automatically running his hand through Hannibal’s hair in a gesture of forgiveness. Hannibal sighed and rubbed his cheek against Will’s knee.

“You wanted to teach me a lesson,” Will acknowledged, “That you weren’t to be trifled with. Instead, I taught you a lesson. Isn’t that right, Hannibal?”

“Yes, my darling,” Hannibal admitted, looking up at him devotedly.

“I want you to let Miriam go as soon as possible,” Will said, his tone even and firm. How amazing, to have Hannibal in the palm of his hand like this, powerless to defy him. “She doesn’t deserve what you did to her to save yourself, anymore than I would have.”

“Very well,” Hannibal nodded. “I had intended to do it fairly soon at any rate. This will keep Jack’s suspicions far away from us for the foreseeable future.”

“Leaving us free to enjoy ourselves as much as we like,” Will concluded, a smile twitching at his lips. The murderous instincts he’d kept down for so long were itching under his skin, dying to come out and play at last. “Within reason.”

“Abigail is being released from the rehabilitation center today, and she’ll be here with her bags in hand this afternoon,” Hannibal shared. “We should give her some time to settle in and see how she feels about a trip to Florence, perhaps in a few months.”

“I’m glad she’ll be here soon,” Will smiled.

“Before our departure, we might indulge a few whims as you like, my love,” Hannibal suggested, kissing the inside of Will’s hand. “I leave it to you to select the participants invited to see you come into your own, with a shining blade in this lovely hand, sharper steel in your eyes.”

“Oh, there are plenty of rude and cruel people in the world, Hannibal,” Will replied, still stroking his hair as his own warm smile turned chilling. It would have disturbed and frightened anyone else, but Hannibal looked at him enraptured. “We’ll have no trouble finding suitable *participants*.”

...Just you and me

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will yawned and stretched, looking like a perfect Renaissance angel spread out on Hannibal's bed. He was naked with the sheets strewn loosely over his hips, his pretty curls rumpled, his vivid sapphire eyes slowly opening.

Hannibal sat beside him with a sketchpad in his lap, his pencil moving rapidly over the paper as he gazed down at Will.

"Don't move," Hannibal whispered, "Just a few moments more."

"Mmm." Will remained still, except to squint up at his lover, unable to resist smiling at the look of total concentration on his face, not to mention the fact that Hannibal, much like himself, was not wearing a damn thing. It was always a delicious sight to wake up to his adoring, handsome boyfriend.

"There," Hannibal finished with a small smile of satisfaction. "Almost adequate."

"Let me see that," Will mumbled. He drew himself up to sitting and slid his butt over so he was right next to Hannibal, and then he snuggled into his neck until Hannibal automatically put an arm around his shoulders to draw him closer. Will looked down at Hannibal's drawing and blushed at the seemingly idealized rendition of his angelic face, serene expression, tossed dark curls and lithe, yet strong body.

"I don't look like *that.*"

"No, you don't," Hannibal agreed. He placed a soft kiss on Will's lips, toying with his curls, releasing a shivery breath although they were both warm with sleepy comfort. "You are much more beautiful. That is why it troubles me that I can never really capture your image, either on paper or in my memory palace, with complete accuracy."

"You capture my imago," Will smiled, nuzzling into his neck with sweet kisses. "And I'm glad you want to keep the memories close. I do, too. But nothing's gonna tear us apart, okay? I'm really, *really* not going anywhere, and you don't have to worry about trying to make every second last forever. Hannibal?"

Hannibal had turned his now tear-filled eyes away and nodded stoically with a lump in his throat. "Thank you, Will."

Will's brow furrowed. "You don't have to *thank* me--"

His phone vibrated, so he picked it up disinterestedly, grunting in annoyance at the screen. He didn't want any calls from "real life" right now, not when his darkest fantasies had become his most cherished reality.

“More calls from Jack?” Hannibal inquired, trying to cover up his overwhelming emotions by changing the subject. He had gotten up out of bed and thrown on a robe, pointlessly tidying the room as he often did when nervous.

“He’s going nuts because the Ripper is back in business,” Will shrugged, typing a quick text of *I’m still on leave, Jack,* then tossing his phone aside with another yawn and a good long stretch. His body was still singing with the shocked elation of his first intentional and planned murder the night before, not to mention the hours of crazy-hot sex he and Hannibal had indulged afterwards.

“Is that a good thing?” Hannibal asked, gathering the blankets they’d defiled and placing them too attentively into a nearby laundry basket, again avoiding Will’s eyes as if worried what he might see there.

“Is it a good thing that the Ripper is active, or that Jack’s freaking out as a result?” Will looked at him discerningly, seeing through his anxiety as it made his heart grow warm and full, longing to make Hannibal feel better, feel sure of him. “Listen, I may not share your love of messing with Jack Crawford’s mind, but we did the right thing last night. We did what we both needed and chose someone who deserved what we gave him.”

He shifted to the edge of the bed and grabbed the collar of Hannibal’s robe, drawing the older man down to him. Though uncharacteristically shy, Hannibal could deny him nothing, and brushed another gentle kiss to his lips.

“You knew exactly what I needed to feel comfortable in my own skin, right from the beginning. Didn’t you?” Will murmured, raking a hand through Hannibal’s cute, floppy, silver morning hair.

“Yes. And now that you’ve felt that satiation, seen me at my most naked essence, perhaps I’m worried you will think better of continuing.” Hannibal straightened to standing and reached for a second laundry hamper that sat on the floor by his dresser.

“Are you about to start folding laundry? Please just talk to me,” Will pleaded.

“I’m afraid of what you’ll say,” Hannibal went on anxiously, “Perhaps just this basket of whites.”

“*Daddy*, come here,” Will demanded, and Hannibal came back to him with slightly shaky hands, his cheeks pink with self-conscious worry.

“I don’t let people see me as you did last night, and live,” Hannibal explained firmly, “Not ever. And for very good reason.”

“You didn’t expect someone could see you like that and still love you, or that my conscience could bear my descent,” Will finished. “Furthermore, your pride really can’t stand that you’ve been this vulnerable, after spending a whole lifetime walling yourself off from that kind of exposure.”

“My pride will be just fine, Will,” said Hannibal with the world’s tiniest smile.

“Maybe you’re more concerned about your heart.” Will lay back on the bed and dragged Hannibal down on top of him, where the older man immediately brushed loving knuckles over his jawline.

“First you must consider that I was completely unaware I had a heart to be broken prior to meeting you.” Hannibal settled easily between his lover’s legs, stroking Will’s thigh and looking beseechingly into his eyes. “Killing with you, Will...the experience was far beyond any rapture I ever dreamed of.”

“It was amazing, Hannibal,” Will whispered, kissing him more deeply than they had so far this morning, lavishing his tongue over Hannibal’s plump lips and sucking his lower one with a soft moan.

“The light of day is upon us, and you have no regrets?” Hannibal asked, his voice husky with the breath he always lost when Will kissed him with that wetly passionate fervor.

“Surprise,” Will corrected him fondly, “I’ve killed with you, I’ve seen you in the thick of the hunt dripping with the blood of our victim, we even cleaned up the evidence and ran off together into the night, and if you couldn’t tell from the way we made love afterwards, Hannibal, I adore you even more now than I did before. I’m a little shaky maybe, still a little in shock. But I’ll never regret it, that I promise you. This is our life now, it’s you and me.”

“You’re truly sure?” Hannibal asked, a tremor in his voice seizing on Will’s heart with a painfully sweet twist of love.

“Really,” Will gently kissed his nose. “And can I ask you a favor?”

“Always.”

“I want you to let go of your worries and just breathe, just be with me in the moment. Will you take me shopping today?” Will asked, wrapping his arms and legs around Hannibal and laying another few kisses on his luscious mouth. “Then maybe...a fancy dinner out somewhere outrageously expensive and just over-the-top luxurious?”

“Are these things you want, or things you’re offering me because you know I find them exciting and comforting?” Hannibal asked, as if afraid to fully embrace this reality, still worried it would be swept away like a curtain to reveal his old loneliness waiting to once again take him over.

“I’m asking you to take me out and spoil me rotten, all day into night, Daddy, because that’s what I *like*. It feels so good when you take care of me. Don’t you wanna?”

Will fluttered his eyelashes, laying it on as thick as possible; it worked like a charm. Hannibal growled softly and sucked a harsh claiming bruise onto his neck, grinding against his thigh with wanton fervor. Will moaned appreciatively and met every thrust of his hips with delighted reciprocal friction, always amazed how quickly they both responded to each other, needy, sensitive and panting within seconds, always skating along the edge of desperation that could eat them alive.

“It’s exactly how I’d choose to spend the day,” Hannibal grinned, his cute fangs and the crinkles by his eyes taking Will’s breath away with their handsome perfection. “Why are you so unfailingly good to me, my darling, even when I am foolish enough to doubt you?”

“I think it might be this face,” Will smirked, softly squeezing his cheek. “And lest we forget, you’re going to be very good to *me,* today, Daddy. I might get a little bratty and demanding, in fact. Might need you to rein me in at times.”

Hannibal squeezed his ass with a mischievous grin to match his lover’s. “One can only hope.”

***

“Jewelry?” Will questioned dubiously.

He was walking hand in hand with Hannibal at a high-end open-air shopping gallery, sipping a decadent hot cocoa while they paused by the window of a jeweler and Hannibal lavished him in a devilishly intent gaze, light brows raised, a delighted smile on his face.

“Why not?” Hannibal asked playfully, sipping his own drink. “Your beauty would only be properly paid tribute to, if I were to cover it in sparkling jewels.”

“C’mon,” Will turned slightly red and ducked his head with a giggle. “You’ve already bought me two suits, a new winter coat, gloves and hats, those dog-patterned pajamas, five scarves, and the silky, lacy underwear which quite frankly--”

Hannibal kissed his cheek. “Yes. Quite frankly.”

“We barely got the trunk to close with all the shopping bags we’ve accumulated today,” Will ‘complained’ unconvincingly. “Now you want to drag me in here to drape me in expensive jewelry, show me off in front of everyone like your pretty little sugar baby?”

“My only real question is if you have a preference to white or traditional gold,” Hannibal answered, his amber eyes glittering.

Will took in the moment as he laughed open-heartedly. The day was slightly drizzle-damp, grey and cold, yet he couldn’t have felt warmer. “You choose.”

By some crazy coincidence, while they were shopping for necklaces, rings, and bracelets, and an actual *belly chain* that made Will clear his throat and blush even harder, the same clique of chatty young women from the day they first went watch shopping happened to pass by. Remembering the handsome “Daddy and boy” they had seen out together previously, they tittered among themselves.

“So cute,” one of them cooed to another, while another girl sighed, “Wish it was me!”

“Hi,” Will grinned at the girls as Hannibal stood before him sliding a jewel-encrusted white gold cuff onto his wrist. “So, you’re totally right. This is my Daddy, and he treats me very well. I’m such a lucky boy. Thanks for noticing!”

“You’re welcome!” One of the girls giggled back before they practically ran away, blushing and still chattering together as if they’d had a celebrity encounter and were both starstruck and mortified.

“Naughty boy. Bragging in public about how Daddy takes care of you,” Hannibal faux-chided, beaming and looking as if nothing could make him happier. Except perhaps for one other thing…

“I should bend you over this very counter and show everyone exactly what you deserve,” Hannibal murmured into Will’s ear as he slid several pure gold bangles onto his wrist to supplement the cuff.

“I won’t stop you,” Will winked. “But guess what, I’m not seriously wearing all of this on my wrist. I feel like Cleopatra right now.”

“This cuff,” Hannibal smiled, “Comes in a matched pair, with a chain to connect them. I thought we might make good use of them tonight.”

“Sold,” Will blurted immediately, excited and curious. They both chuckled as Hannibal relieved him of the rest of the heavy bracelets and signaled to the jeweler.

“We’ll take the pair of cuffs,” Hannibal announced with his usual smoothly prim confidence. It made Will’s trousers feel very tight as all the blood in his body made a mass exodus for his thickening cock. His arousal only grew more intense as Hannibal continued talking with the jeweler, an older woman who looked somewhat bemused by Hannibal’s incredibly exorbitant purchases.

“Really? In addition to the belly chain, the emerald pendant and ring, and the other bracelets you’ve asked me to put aside? Sir, that puts your purchase today at…” Looking mildly alarmed, genuinely concerned for Hannibal’s wallet, she tilted the cash register screen so he could see the insane cost he’d racked up.

Jesus. Will stared at how many thousands of dollars Hannibal was spending on him just in this one store today as his cock pressed so insistently to the front of his dark blue trousers, he had to cover his groin by casually holding his coat in front of him. His head spun slightly and he bit his lip to stifle a moan as Hannibal leaned in with a small smile to the jeweler and said mischievously but emphatically, “Yes, really. Please make sure everything is wrapped in gift boxes with tissue and large bows. Except for this cuff; my lovely companion would like to wear it to dinner. Wouldn’t you, my love?”

“Yes, of course,” Will nodded. Just like the Rolex, this golden cuff with its slim encircling line of pure, shining diamonds made him feel especially claimed and marked, loved beyond his wildest dreams. He already had his white shirt sleeves rolled to the elbows to show off the bracelet, and as Hannibal neatly slid his credit card into the payment slot, once again he swooned and thought he might black out from the incomparable bliss of being Daddy’s spoiled, very good and very naughty boy. Little did Hannibal suspect that while his back was briefly turned a few minutes before, Will had made a secret purchase of his own, something to show his lover exactly how he felt.

***

They took a water taxi across the inner harbor to their dinner destination, a swanky restaurant which Hannibal had been wanting to try. The day had drifted into evening as the grey sky dimmed and a pale sliver of a moon shone overhead. Light misty rain, too cool and pleasant to resent, kissed their exposed skin and shimmered prettily off the water.

Will rested his head on Hannibal's shoulder as the older man played contentedly with the cuff on his wrist. He snuggled close, breathing in the refreshing chill in the air and the soothing motion of the boat. They were moving forward, always, together. Hannibal smelled so good and felt even better, warm and solid beside him, just as excited for the rest of the night as he was. Just as thrilled for their future.

"Never let it be said we don't make the most of our alone time," Will said. "We're going to have to tone it down a bit when Abigail comes back from that college tour."

"I'm glad she hasn't entirely dismissed the idea of a higher education," Hannibal conceded, "Although I'm hopeful she will ultimately decide to join us on our trip to Florence, before commencing her studies."

"She doesn't seem to be afraid of living her life anymore, now that we're a family," Will nodded thoughtfully. "Now that Freddie's gone, she feels...safe."

"How do you feel?" Hannibal murmured thoughtfully.

"Safe," Will smiled. "Fearless." He slipped a small, hidden object from his coat pocket, his heartbeat speeding up.

Will met Hannibal's infinitely curious gaze, then lifted his boyfriend's hand and opened it, palm-side up. He placed the white gold engagement ring in Hannibal's warm palm as the black diamonds with which the ring was encrusted glimmered in the moonlight.

"I wanted to get you a treat today, too," Will grinned at Hannibal's completely shocked expression.

"This is an engagement ring, Will," Hannibal almost stammered.

"I noticed. See, I saw this while we were shopping today and I just thought, that's the ring, this is the night. Do you like it?"

"Of course I like it," said Hannibal throatily, his eyes wet, his whole expression overcome with astonished confusion. His attitude towards the ring was immediately insistent and possessive, his way of saying, *Will gave me this, to call me his own for life, it is precious, Will truly loves me*. Will knew no one would ever be able to wrench the ring from Hannibal's hand for the rest of his life. "But Will, if this is another way to reassure--"

Will put a hand over his blathering mouth and sank to one knee, maintaining his balance as the water taxi weaved through its brief journey. "It's not a reassurance, it's a promise. It's a

proposal, because I want to be your husband and want you to be mine, forever. What do you say?"

Hannibal wiped away tears of joy and kept staring at him, finally coming to fully believe this was one hundred percent real and permanent. "Of course, I -- that is to say, naturally, I want --" He almost choked on a sob and looked around, disoriented and thrown for a loop by his shocked elation. "Will, you can't just--"

"I think I just did," Will smirked adoringly, caressing Hannibal's knee, watching his lover staring at the ring in his hand. "Can I put that on you?"

Hannibal nodded, "Please."

They kissed, laughed, cried and hugged each other until the boat pulled into the dock by the restaurant, and Hannibal composed himself to whatever extent he possibly could. The water taxi driver and some people passing by on the dock gave them a round of applause, making Hannibal look supremely pleased as Will blushed, unable to wipe the smile from his face.

"Shall we, mylimasis?" Hannibal asked, never looking more gorgeous than now, decked out in his impeccable three piece suit, tears still shining on his regally high cheekbones, a huge smile on his face as he stood on the dock and offered a hand to help Will down from the boat.

"We shall," Will winked.

***

They had a luxurious dinner in a beautiful candlelit restaurant, racking up an enormous bill with Hannibal's extravagant ordering. He nudged Will's foot with his own under the table with a seductive sparkle in his eyes as he reeled off the requests from the chef's most exquisite offerings, and if Will wasn't very much mistaken, his fiance was also doing his best to show off his hand with the new ring on it as often as possible. Hannibal seemed to be gesturing more frequently than usual, as if with every move and every secret, knowing smile across the table at Will, he was telegraphing the message to the rest of the world, *we're engaged! He's all mine. Aren't you jealous?*

"And we're celebrating our engagement," Hannibal announced smoothly and delightedly to the waitress while placing their drink order. "Have I mentioned?"

"Several times," Will laughed. "You told the maitre d and those acquaintances of yours we passed on the way to our table, too."

"Since you're celebrating such an exciting event, I think you two need our finest champagne," the waitress enthused. "Congratulations, you make a beautiful couple!"

"Yes, don't we?" Hannibal agreed with cheerful vanity. Will beamed, thinking he had never seen Hannibal this happy before and he wanted to keep him that way forever.

***

Later that night, they curled up on the couch at home and watched *A Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Child*.

“Really,” Hannibal fussed, “After Nancy sacrificed herself to destroy this exceptionally rude dream specter, one would expect him to remain dead for quite some time. Didn’t her father burn his skeleton?”

“Well, *Nightmare 3* was a huge hit, so Freddy had to come back,” Will explained, cuddling up to his fiance.

He remembered the last time they did this, before they were together. That feeling of nervous confusion over whether they were flirting or not might be gone, but the butterflies in Will’s stomach were just as strong as ever when it came to Hannibal. He had the distinct impression that was never going away, and it made him blissful.

Hannibal wrapped an arm around him, kissed his forehead and snuggled his nose into his boy’s delightful curls, breathing him in. This time, when the occasional, actual-scary scene came up, Will didn’t hesitate to hold Hannibal closer and show his fear -- in fact, if Hannibal was not mistaken, Will was actually playing up his reactions a bit just to get the extra attention. While he need rely on no such premise to achieve the goal, Hannibal found his antics so adorable, he pretended he really believed Will was so worried about Freddy Krueger that he needed to watch the remainder of the film nearly in Hannibal’s lap whilst having his feet rubbed.

“Know what I’m in the mood for now?” Will murmured, batting his eyelashes at Hannibal when the end credits rolled. “Tequila and Truth or Dare. Abigail will be back tomorrow morning, but we can have as much fun making noise tonight as we like.”

“All too true, mylimasis.” Hannibal rose with a resplendent grin, and they went to the kitchen to get the ingredients for the shots.

In the bedroom, Will wasted no time in doing everything he’d secretly wanted to do on the night of their first “sleepover.” He sucked the lime with extravagantly over-the-top attention, then licked at the salt on his wrist with the same lingering sensuous suggestion. Hannibal met his eyes with a fierce but quiet flash of arousal, watching every move Will made like a predator about to pounce.

And pounce he did, the moment they had each taken their first shot. He lunged across the couch, knocked the tray to the floor and sent the tequila bottle and glasses rolling away haphazardly. All in a few moments, his lips were searing into Will’s, licking off the salty-sweet remnants of tequila and lime; he had Will sitting upright in his lap, grinding shamelessly over the hard bulge in Hannibal’s pajama pants. He raked his fingers hard down Will’s back, then grabbed his ass aggressively, tightly tugging Will’s curls and kissing him with bruising force.

“You’re teasing me,” Hannibal growled as Will melted against him, hard as a rock and aching to be fucked until the break of dawn.

He longed to have Hannibal taking him over, controlling him, doing whatever he wanted with his body, and that was all he cared about on this night. He couldn't care less that his phone was vibrating again, no doubt with more pleas and/or complaints from Jack, *you can't stay on leave forever, eventually you're just gone.* Will understood at last that he was under no obligation to satisfy Jack Crawford's or anyone else's expectations of who he was or what he ought to be doing in order to be considered a worthwhile contributing member of society. He was beautiful, cherished and loved right here, simply for being himself. As for work, he could make up his mind about that whenever the hell he wanted.

"Yes, I am. I dare you to fuck me, Dr. Lecter," Will smirked when Hannibal drew back from his lips only to draw breath again.

Hannibal was exhilarated with the fruition of all his naughty fantasies from the previous slumber party, when he'd made himself behave so chastely. His handsome face was flushed with delighted mischief and his hands were all over Will, sliding down his chest, toying with his nipples, then smoothing over his stomach and back to slip right down his new red pajama pants -- the ones with little dogs on them -- and cup Will's bare ass.

"I don't know what would have occurred if you had dared to behave so provocatively with me on the first evening we enjoyed this game. Tell me the truth, Will...were you thinking about it?"

"Constantly. And I think I know what would have happened…" Will leaned in and sucked Hannibal's lower lip, then nibbled it as he canvassed his lover's beautiful broad shoulders and firm biceps, then slid his fingers through the gorgeous silvery hair over his perfect pecs. "If I played Truth or Dare shirtless with you while we were still just friends, if I licked and sucked the lime and salt right in front of you, wrapped my lips around the glass and drank the liquor down deep, like I wanted to suck your cock. You would have had me, you would have lost control. Right, Daddy?"

"That's right, my dear. For now…" Hannibal stood, taking Will along with him, scooping his boy up in his strong arms, then laying him on the bed, admiring his trembling, lovely form and the way his erection stood boldly out under the thin cotton of his cute pajama pants.

"For now, Daddy is going to try out the new gift he bought you today." Purring the words into Will's ear, Hannibal stepped back, watching as two pink splotches spread over Will's cheeks.

Will squirmed slightly, wriggling his legs in the difficult effort to resist touching his aching cock. He knew this would have displeased Hannibal, so he held out, and held out his wrists when Hannibal came back to him with the two white gold cuffs, now joined by a slender but solid chain. Smiling, Hannibal fastened the cuffs on Will's wrists, stripped him of his pants, then used one of his neck ties to secure the boy's ankles together.

"There's nothing you can do now, my dear, except to take whatever it is I choose to give you," said Hannibal slyly.

As Will swallowed hard, Hannibal retrieved a slim black riding crop from a drawer in his bureau. He stroked the firm paddling end of the whip slowly from the crown of Will's head

all the way down to his legs, then back, carefully grazing the softly solid crop over Will's cock and balls, then ghosting it over his nipples before using it to tip Will's face up and make their gazes lock. Will had borne with this entire teasing affair in a quivering, softly moaning, gently messy way of which Hannibal thoroughly approved.

"Good boys let their Daddies play as long as they want, and show patience," Hannibal murmured, practically salivating at the way Will kept twitching and letting out shallow breaths as he pushed him firmly onto his side and grazed the crop against his ass with long, suggestive strokes.

"Yes," Will whispered, remaining completely pliable.

"And then a very, very good boy who has been patient for such a nice, long time will get to come," Hannibal elaborated, heat radiating from his hungry eyes as Will looked over his shoulder and bit his lip.

Hannibal struck his ass three times quickly with the riding crop, making Will whimper for more immediately. The older man was all too happy to oblige, especially as the sight of Will's beautiful curves turning pink, then red, bouncing under his loving care, made his own cock fill out more thickly, drops of precum wetting the front of his silky pants.

Losing himself just a little, Hannibal climbed onto the bed and licked between Will's pretty, throbbing ass cheeks, holding the boy open and getting his warmly questing tongue as deep as he could before teasing with one finger. Without even waiting for the lube, Will urged his ass back into Hannibal's touch so that the older man growled and sank his digit into Will's tight heat, causing the boy to loose a short cry of pained delight; meanwhile, Hannibal hissed at his snug, velvety smoothness inside, the way Will would rather have him sooner and with a little discomfort than wait only a few moments more for the lube.

"Sweet boy," Hannibal sighed, fucking his finger slowly in and out of his charming angel, "That's not very patient, but I'm happy you need Daddy so much. That you show me you need me, without shame or hesitation."

"Need you too much to pretend anything else," Will answered on a halted breath. "Hmm, so good, Hannibal, your hands…"

"Yes, my darling?" Hannibal spat generously on his hand and Will's pretty hole, then slid his finger in again, deeper, almost brushing against Will's prostate before expertly drawing back.

"I want your hands all the time," Will moaned, finally shifting in slight rebellion against the cuffs on his wrists; his ankles meanwhile wriggled against his restraints. "Take care of me, Daddy, fuck me with your hand, as much of it as you can--"

"Baby," Hannibal tsked, shaking his head. His hair fell softly over his brow in a deceptive appearance of graceful domesticity. "You do provoke me. I hope you don't seriously believe I'm going to allow you to come any time soon."

Will whimpered again as Hannibal withdrew his finger and procured the lube. Slicking two fingers this time, Hannibal scissored Will slowly, with careful restraint, savoring the

extensive litany of swears and begging which resulted as he tormented his fiance with teasing, too-short strokes of his big fingers. Still, it was all he could do to hold back from slamming much harder and faster into that deliciously gorgeous heat, as Will clung to him, sticky-slick and needy, helpless against his bindings. Will was much, much too ravishing to deserve any less than a desperately painful, sharp, long and deep orgasm drawn from him after hours of delay, and that's just what he would receive tonight.

At first, Will didn't truly believe Hannibal would possess the will-power to deny him for such a long time. When he nearly came on Hannibal's hand, Will gasped for air when the orgasm was yanked back right before it landed, Hannibal slipping his fingers from Will with a gently serious word of caution, "Now, don't fuss. Let Daddy take control, you know it is what you need."

"I know," Will said on a stifled cry, "I know. I can wait...I know you understand what's best for me."

"That's right," Hannibal smiled before giving Will the most mind-vaporizing blow job of his life, only to pull his mouth off right before he took Will to the breaking point.

"Fuck, oh, God, no-- please, please let me come, Daddy?" Will begged, sweaty and trembling harder than ever. He looked so very pretty in his cuffs, unable to do anything to take his own pleasure or touch Hannibal, which were the only two things he could summon the cogent thought to desire. Hannibal thought that they next time they did this, Will should wear the silk and lace panties and the belly chain as well, but he had simply been too impatient himself to unpack all of the gifts at once. They had bought so many things in one day, he rather enjoyed the idea of introducing them one at a time into the bedroom.

He and Will would have to be quiet again once Abigail was home, but that presented its own charms as a challenge. The three of them were so happy in their days as a new family, it was no burden to Hannibal that he must acclimate to having a daughter downstairs and needing to hold a hand over Will's lovely, dirty mouth when he fucked the living daylights out of him. Especially because Will was so very vocal during sex ordinarily, smothering his cries and forcing him to be quiet was equally as appealing as making him give in to being as loud as he liked. Will's soft, hectic broken whisper-cries were precious and sweet, as were the frustrated whines he was currently producing. When it came to Will, Hannibal had never known such a wide variety of luscious temptations.

And they would have the rest of their lives to play.

"Not yet, my dear," Hannibal soothed, laying a kiss on Will's hot, sweaty brow, roving his hand through mussed curls before he administered another strong spanking, this time with his bare hands, since Will loved them so much. He drizzled lube all over his cock at last and dragged it heavy and long between his boy's cheeks, keeping it up without penetration until the simple friction against Will's soft, reddened curves was almost enough to make Hannibal come.

"Just fuck me, *God,*" Will almost drooled by now, grasping his own fingers, positioned on his knees with his cuffed hands out in front of him, an uncomfortable and stiff posture.

Hannibal admired his self-discipline, his stubborn insistence on allowing every one of Hannibal's whims, despite the occasional blurted cry of protest. He would give Will a lengthy massage later to make sure every ache was eased from his muscles. For now, he squeezed himself and let out a husky groan, knowing there was no possible chance he would be able to hold out much longer himself. Luckily, they were to be at this for so long that Hannibal was confident he could regain his arousal several times.

"Fuck, fuck, *fuck*" Will blathered against the sheets, nonsensically, as Hannibal did just that, thrusting into his ass with no rhythm, every move designed to *almost* get Will off, but the slick clutch of Will's exquisite body was too much for Hannibal to bear; he came into his boy with a ragged sigh, grabbed his ass in a vice grip and left a new handprint; bit Will's shoulder and snarled into his ear, "You'll be taking more of Daddy's cum tonight, Will. That's just the beginning."

"*Oh,*" Will whimpered, biting the sheets, more drool spilling from his sweet lips to wet the bed linens, "Oh, Daddy. Thank you so much."

"I meant it when I told you that you will always have all the best of what I have to give, and that I will spoil you quite 'rotten,' to my satisfaction, day and night. I'm a hard man to satisfy, Will, and you are my favorite work of art, my favorite dish and my weakness, all at once."

He pulled himself from Will with a soft gasp, then moved up the bed to place his flagging erection directly in front of his fiance's red, swollen lips. "Suck Daddy until he can fuck you again, my darling," he commanded lovingly, stroking Will's curls as the boy melted once again to his ruling hand.

As Will enveloped his cock with the warm, wet heaven of his mouth, Hannibal let out a wounded moan of oversensitive discomfort mingling with ecstasy. What a wonderful, delirious way to hurt, to push his pleasure with Will to the furthest extremes. He only wanted to take it further until they were both broken and sated.

Once he was hard again, Hannibal roughly flipped Will over and untied his ankles. Will raised his bound hands over his head and wrapped his legs tightly around his lover as Hannibal reentered him. This time, he used his naughty wiles and the way it made Hannibal's head spin to feel how much he returned his love by clinging to him in the only manner he had available, used it to almost make Hannibal forget he was still going to edge him for quite some time.

"Wicked thing," Hannibal smirked with a soft slap to Will's face. "I'm going to make you wait even longer because you tempted me."

"I know," Will said on a broken mix of a cry and a laugh, "That's why I did it."

Finally, after Hannibal had come all over his stomach and fed the cum to him off his fingers, after Will warmed his cock for quite some time, then sucked when Hannibal was ready again, finally as Will's neck and shoulders ached with sore exertion and his cock jerked untouched and weeping with need, Hannibal let Will ride him, his bound hands dangling limply around Hannibal's neck. Exhausted but never more determined, Will rode Hannibal's thick cock as

hard as he could until the pleasure again blossomed from his prostate, tingling over his whole body -- it was the pleasure not just of this burgeoning orgasm, but of all the other ones which he had been denied, causing the tension to mount so hot and sweet inside him that his cries were urgent and heady, his rhythm faster, desperate, pounding Hannibal's cock into his ass until Hannibal grinned proudly and beckoned, "Now, baby, come for Daddy now."

Will threw his head back as he rode his fiance for three more good, hard strokes before exploding in a blinding, white-hot blur of immense pleasure. The sight of Will's total abandon combined with the exquisite way his boy clenched him as the orgasm tore through his body to make Hannibal come as well, so hard it shocked him. With a shudder, Hannibal spilled up into Will one more time, then held him so tenderly. He rubbed Will's back, murmuring soothing words of comfort to help him bear the tormenting overflow of bliss.

Hannibal licked every drop of cum from Will's sweat-slick skin, obsessively breathing in the scent of their sex all over his fiance's form. Then he unlocked the cuffs and drew Will into his arms, singing to him softly something old-fashioned and vaguely familiar, the melody calm and gentle, the lyrics in French. He rocked Will slowly as the boy snuggled into his chest and clung to him with weak arms.

"Thank you, Daddy," was all Will could manage to mutter in his dizzy, happily sloppy state.

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Later, as Hannibal massaged Will's shoulders and back while his boy lay prone on the bed, he murmured thoughtfully, "What was your favorite part?"

"Hmm...maybe when you slipped the fourth finger in?" Will blushed, his face resting comfortably on the soft pillow as Hannibal kneaded the tension from his body and made him feel he would drift into slumber at any moment.

"That *was* quite treat, wasn't it?" Hannibal recalled rather smugly.

"I'd hit you with a pillow if I could fucking *move*," Will snarked.

"Does my admittedly arrogant pleasure in pleasing you cause you such disdain, my darling?" Hannibal raised his eyebrows with equal playfulness.

"It's not disdain at all...it's you being so cute, I can't stand it. It's me being so happy...I can't believe it, yet it's the only thing I've ever really believed in."

Will's face softened as Hannibal finished his work and helped him to sit, then handed him a glass of water with a straw.

"Mmm," he sighed after a long sip.

"I know you must be parched, but take it slowly, my love." Hannibal rubbed his shoulder and helped him to stop and take a few breaths before sipping again.

"Know what's even better than when you slipped the fourth finger in?" Will asked with a sweet smile.

“Better than that? It must be something special.” Hannibal swiped away some of the water dripping from Will’s lips.

“This, what’s on your other hand.” Will kissed Hannibal’s ring finger, admiring the look of the band around it announcing Hannibal was eternally spoken for, he belonged to Will. “This is the best part. You’re mine now, forever.”

“Forever, my dear. No one else could ever claim my heart.”

“But others have tried,” Will noted, a new devilish light sneaking into his eyes.

“To no avail. Yet if you feel anyone in particular is owed special reprisal for desiring me, I will be more than happy to assist you in the endeavor.”

“I think it’s time for the Chesapeake Ripper to take his final victim,” Will said, his voice cold and deep as a river. It sent a shiver through Hannibal; his fiance had him in a thrall of excitement laced with something almost like fear. No one Hannibal had ever seen could compare with Will at his most deadly.

“Yes, a last hurrah for the Ripper, before dear Frederick pays the price for his heinous crimes,” Hannibal affirmed merrily.

“Time to pay the good Dr. Sutcliffe a visit,” Will smiled.

Chapter End Notes

We'll learn -- and get to see up close -- more about the boys' murderous shenanigans in the final chapter. We'll also get to see some Murder Family sweetness and check in with some of our other supporting characters <333

Let it Be

Chapter Notes

> cw: The chapter begins with Murder Husbands up to some serious mischief, in violent detail. So if you came for the fluff and don't care to read the gruesome stuff, just skip down to the first set of asterisks for the *very* fluffy rest of the chapter. Second cw: there is also a brief reference to homophobic behavior.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“D-don’t do that,” Donald Sutcliffe pleaded, tied to a chair in the dungeon-like lair of Hannibal’s basement.

The chair was situated neatly atop a tarp on the floor, for easy clean-up when this was done. And Hannibal smiled neatly at his colleague when the man stared at him in desperation over Will’s shoulder. The profiler pressed a shining blade tight to his throat.

“Don’t look at him,” Will smirked, colder than ice. “Look at me.”

Sutcliffe dragged his terrified eyes to meet Will’s evil glare as Hannibal watched with barely stifled ecstatic pride. Amazing, that he used to believe Will would be his finest creation, when in reality Will was so much more hellishly beautiful than he could have dreamed. Hannibal was the one who had turned into someone new as a result of Will’s influence: someone capable of true love.

Will drew the blade back just enough to let Sutcliffe speak without the sharp steel drawing blood when his adam’s apple moved.

“You thought you could have him?” Will demanded in a low, syrupy, hateful tone. “Tell me the truth.”

“Yes, I...I was attracted,” Sutcliffe admitted, sweating and crying, helpless especially due to the paralytic that left him slack from the neck down. “I w-wanted him.”

“You flirted with him.” Will’s lips twitched, his cherubic smile haunting. “He’s mine.”

“You didn’t even know him when we met,” Sutcliffe spat, indignant all of a sudden.

A last surge of energy before he fully gave up, Hannibal guessed. Donald was a weakling at heart, and he had been incredibly easy to capture. The tales which Hannibal had confided to Will of Sutcliffe's horrible mistreatment and callous experimentation on patients had solidified Will's initial burst of jealousy into full-on hatred.

“Are you claiming some sort of *ownership* over my fiance because you saw him first?” Will demanded.

He sliced a long line down Sutcliffe’s forearm where his shirt sleeve had been unceremoniously shoved up to his elbow. Blood dribbled down his arm; he couldn’t feel that, but he knew he was losing too many pints to survive. His other arm had already suffered a matching slice at Will’s hand. And he was definitely going to feel what came next.

“Stop that, please, please!” Sutcliffe whined, his defiance disappearing just that easily. “Please...” He coughed, getting weaker by the minute. “Do...you know how many people probably see and want him in a single day? He’s very handsome and charming, why is that my fault?”

“It’s your fault for seeing him with me and slinking up to him like I wasn’t even there, trying your disgusting little wiles on him. *Don’t* look at him,” Will snapped.

“Oh, God, I’m going to die,” Sutcliffe sobbed.

“First I’m going to cut your eyes out,” Will purred, “for looking at my man. He belongs to me, don’t you, Hannibal?”

“I do, my darling,” Hannibal answered, his voice tight with arousal.

“Before I take your eyes, I should let him fuck me in front of you, but you don’t deserve to see him like that,” Will determined.

“Don’t take my eyes, just kill me," Sutcliffe cried, pale, sweaty and pathetic.

No longer the coldly confident modern-day Dr. Frankenstein, now Sutcliffe was as weak as the patients whose minds and health he had twisted out of his own morbid ambition. Unlike Hannibal, there was no beauty, no meaning to Sutcliffe's crimes; he tampered with his patients' well-being while lying to them, simply because the results of his little tests might yield him answers to advance his career.

"Please!" He sobbed, dripping blood in rich red torrents all over the floor, where it fell onto the tarp with a satisfying splash.

He was being altogether too loud, and Will rolled his eyes. “I guess we’d better start with your tongue.”

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“You did marvelously,” Hannibal praised as they finished cleaning up, then loaded the carefully removed organs into the large refrigerator against the back wall of the basement.

Will turned from where he had just finished washing his hands at the sink and blushed. “Really? I made a huge mess, lost my temper a few times. I’m not as methodical as you, nowhere near as careful. I was worried you’d think I was too green, making mistakes that would get us caught.”

Hannibal came to him and cupped his face adoringly. “Leave it to me to ensure we’re not caught, and continue enjoying your becoming, my sweet love. In time you will learn all you need to know; for now simply relish the experience. You are a wonder to behold, and I could never ask for a more eager and devoted partner.”

“You like that I get so jealous,” Will ventured, still vibrating with nervous energy. It was very hard for him to come down after a kill, and he needed a lot of Hannibal’s care to help him adjust to this new release of a part of him he had kept locked inside for so many years. “So jealous I had to slice him to ribbons.”

“I love it,” Hannibal professed, elated.

He pressed Will against the hard, rough wall, laying a smoldering kiss on his lips. A quick rush of lust to the head, something to help Will feel centered again when the chaotic nature of his killer state left him wildly anxious. Will responded with wild abandon, not caring that the wall was scraping his back. They kissed hard and bit each other’s lips red with blood they licked and sucked with happy moans.

“I wish we had more time before our guests arrive, but we really must get started on the preparations. And Abigail will be home from the library soon,” Hannibal said, lest he lose his senses enough to fuck Will right against the wall.

“Shut up,” Will snarked with a wicked grin. He whipped his own pants down, kicked them aside, and undid Hannibal’s trousers, taking his own cock in hand with long, needy strokes, trembling in his deep desire for Hannibal’s touch and love.

Hannibal growled, found the lube which he always kept close by when they were hunting, and fucked Will roughly against the wall. He spanked him and called him a good boy, thrusting hard and fast until Will came untouched with an ecstatic near scream, Hannibal pumping him full of hot seed. It was enough to calm Will’s nerves after their eventful afternoon.

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Afterwards, they quietly prepared for the dinner party while exchanging pointed looks and saucy smiles. Will served as a capable sous chef, again showing admirable quick learning to Hannibal’s delighted instruction.

Sutcliffe had been the second victim they had killed together. Will had decided to save him for third in their rounder, as he wanted to work up some skill before enjoying the treat of killing his would-be romantic rival. To decide on a previous “participant,” they had gone through Hannibal’s rolodex until they found someone vile enough to fulfill both of their prerequisites for a victim, a despicably homophobic local politician who had recently been on the news suggesting that gay marriage should once again be made illegal, along with other offensive and hurtful vitriol.

They had killed the man in his kitchen, and Will had been gruesome, had lost himself, stabbing ferociously until he was splattered in blood. That time, Hannibal had been equally aroused; he leaned Will over the politician’s kitchen island and took him brutally hard, telling

Will he was precious, so beautiful and skillful, telling him he loved him more than anything or anyone.

As with Sutcliffe's death, it would be very easy to add the evidence into the collection which Hannibal had already been accumulating for the framing of Frederick Chilton. Tonight's dinner party was the last they would be sharing among the whole cast of their so-called "friends" before Miriam Lass was mysteriously released to point her shaking finger at the slimy BSHCI administrator who had, according to Hannibal's carefully orchestrated version of events, held her captive all this time and cut her other arm off to taunt Jack. And of course, a selection of the choicest cuts of meat from their victims was to be included in this evening's menu.

"Jeez, what happened to your wrist, Dad?" Abigail asked in concern as they stood at the kitchen counter. She was slicing the tops off strawberries while Will diced onions and Hannibal checked on the roast in the oven.

Will smiled, still very happy and proud with the newness of her calling him "Dad." Her eyes had caught on the red marks left on his wrists by the cuffs. He laughed softly, "It's nothing to worry about."

"Certainly not," Hannibal put in, his tone casual as he sprinkled thyme all over the meat.

Abigail glanced from Hannibal's broad back and his head attentively bent over the cuisine, to Will's slight blush and the way he cleared his throat and got back to chopping veggies.

"*Oh,*" She realized, blushing as well, "Oh, that's what it is. Ew, God, forget I asked. I mean, don't get me wrong, I'm happy you two are so in love, but I don't need the details--"

"Abigail," Hannibal said with his prim but indisputable authority, "Please dip the strawberries in chocolate sauce and place the tray in the refrigerator. They'll need to cool until our guests arrive."

"Those look amazing," Will praised her work as Abigail shortly afterwards arranged several impressively decorative rows of bright strawberries robed in dark chocolate. "Like they came from a bakery."

"Thanks," she said proudly, beaming at her finished product before she put the tray in the fridge. "Oooh, look at you. Dad," she called to Hannibal, "I'm not sure you should have Dad chopping onions. He's a crying wreck over here."

"My dear," Hannibal said to Will, coming to him in the "Kiss the Chef" apron which Will had recently gifted him, "Try having a mouthful of cold water in your mouth when you chop the onions. I've found that it prevents my eyes from watering when…"

"Okay," Will nodded, brushing self-consciously at his cheeks.

Hannibal's face softened and he kissed Will's cheek while squeezing his shoulder. "There now, mylimasis, all is well."

Abigail realized it wasn't the onions that had made Will tear up, and her own heart grew warm in response. It was just the simple reality of the three of them orbiting the kitchen because they belonged there together as a family, the sound of their familiar voices chiming in nonchalant conversation reflecting their bond, the exchange of fond jokes and smiles. Tears sprang into her own eyes as she watched Hannibal give Will a quick hug before her fathers resumed their work on the evening's menu.

Her real -- well, her biological parents had never been happy like that. There had always been this uncomfortable tension under the surface; her mom seemed unsatisfied and disconnected from the rest of them, her dad too much of a dreamer, more interested in hunting with Abigail than anything else. Her old life had never been like *this,* and she was still adjusting to the idea of being loved without the expectation that she needed to fulfill any preformed idea of herself or "earn" their approval.

Her bio dad had spent a lot of time pressuring her into sharing his hobbies, whether or not it was something that interested her or made her feel comfortable. She never had a chance to discover if her guilty thrill in the hunt was genuine, or a product of her father's glowing approval, *or* her fear of what he would do if she didn't participate. Here, she could just...breathe. Her new dads obviously had their own violent proclivities, but they left her to decide whether or not she wanted to engage. Thus far, she had opted not to, taking the time to consider where her comfort levels were, to learn them with time. Perhaps she'd join in the hunt sooner than she thought, but it would be by her own choice.

Plus, the three of them just got along so well. They had fun! Later tonight, they were going to watch a stupid horror sequel, and she couldn't wait to poke fun at the cheesy special effects from her perch in the chair beside the couch where her dads would share popcorn and affectionate smiles. The only real issue she had was that they were so freaking picky about who she went out with. For God's sake, since moving in with them a couple of months ago, Abigail had only brought two boys home, and they'd each received a stern interrogation from her dads that left her red-faced and steaming. She'd taken them to task when she got home from both dates, but all Will did was shrug and say, "Sorry, I tried to hold him back," as if he hadn't been just as gung ho in the line of questioning of her college boy crushes as Hannibal. As for Hannibal, he'd given her a stern smile and said he had to make sure any "potential future son-in-laws were worthy of her."

Still, it was kind of nice to feel so protected; *really* nice to be so valued that her dads looked out for her safety, well-being and happiness with such attentiveness. She wondered if she was going to fall in love with some hot Italian on their trip to Florence, and how her dads would react if this occurred, causing her to smirk as she gathered napkins to set out on the dining room table.

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Beverly let out a whistle as she admired Hannibal's dining room. "Wow, is that a herb garden in the *wall*?"

"Yes, and this basil is exquisite, would you look at that? Check out the rosemary," Price enthused, touching a glistening tiny green leaf right before Hannibal reappeared, looking imposing in his flawless royal blue suit with a paisley ascot.

“Don’t *touch,*” Zeller chided him with a brisk little slap to his hand. “We were just saying, uh, sweet garden, Dr. Lecter.”

“Gentlemen and Ms. Katz,” Hannibal said as his stern face melted into a friendly smile, his rumbling voice ever so cordial. “Welcome. Please, call me Hannibal.”

“I’m not going to call him ‘Hannibal,’” Jimmy whispered to the others, making Will snort a laugh as he strode across the room to stand by Hannibal’s side as host. “It seems too informal. He’s so formal!”

“I’m going to try it out,” Zeller shrugged. “Thanks, Hannibal,” he said a bit more loudly, “By the way, awesome spread, too.” He gestured to the table with its lavish assortment of buffet items.

Hannibal gave a short nod, his smile still frozen on his face as Will elbowed him and said through his teeth as he grinned, “Be nice to my friends.”

Beverly looked at Price who looked at Zeller.

“Yeah, no,” Zeller realized, stacking his plate with hors 'd'oeuvres, “I can’t call him Hannibal. It’s too weird.”

“What’s too weird?” Jack asked, entering the room with Alana trailing him. Abigail, who had let them in, made an excuse to disappear to the kitchen.

Jack and Alana glanced around the splendid dining room, at Will and Hannibal’s delighted host expressions, the extravagant assortment of fancy cuisine, and the science team making cheerful conversation while munching their snacks. "What do you think of that painting?" Brian muttered to Jimmy, who squinted and asked, "Is that a *horny swan*?"

While Katz, Zeller and Price had easily given into the spirit of the evening, Jack looked suspicious and Alana unsure. Will just went to them warmly and shook their hands, then took their coats while Hannibal found out what they wanted to drink. Will knew he and Hannibal were being risky, showing off, reveling in their happiness and the fact that they had gotten away with two recent murders right under Jack’s nose. It probably shone through his own merry mood, making the whole affair seem even stranger to Jack and Alana, who were so used to a dour, disheveled Will Graham and barely recognized this smoothly suited, neat-haired, relaxed man who had replaced him. The deep blue suit he wore not only brought out the striking color of his eyes, but matched Hannibal's perfectly.

After extricating himself from a barrage of questions from Price and Zeller over who could call Hannibal “Hannibal” without it being weird, Jack found Abigail in the kitchen. The girl looked elegant this evening, and like her new “fathers,” entirely at home. She wore a sage green floral dress with her long auburn hair pulled into a pretty ponytail. The green scarf around her neck was the only reminder of why she had come into their lives, and even that she carried off with effortless charm, her slender neck holding her head up high. It did again seem almost as if she had inherited Hannibal’s pride and Will’s mysterious nature.

“Can I help you with something, Agent Crawford?” Abigail inquired frostily.

She was busy arranging a tray of foie gras, brioche, fruit and nuts to bring into the dining room, and looked none too pleased he was hovering there across the kitchen, giving her his usual look of barely contained accusation. He was still so sure she had killed Nicholas Boyle, it was obnoxious.

So what if she *had* killed Nick Boyle? Abigail fumed inwardly, keeping a smug half-smile in place. It was none of Crawford's damn business, not least of all because he would never prove it. She had a new beginning here, she was happy, and nobody was going to spoil it.

"Just looking for some extra napkins," Jack smiled smoothly. "Agents Price and Zeller spilled a little champagne."

"Here," she thrust a handful of maroon cloth napkins at him.

"Thank you. So, you must be pretty broken up over the murder of Freddie Lounds." Jack took the napkins while giving her another of those annoyingly knowing looks.

She rolled her pretty blue eyes and huffed a sigh. "Is this another of your groundless accusations, Agent Crawford? I had nothing to do with that, just like I had nothing to do with my dad's crimes or Nicholas Boyle's murder."

"I'm just...expressing my condolences," Jack explained drily. He popped a green olive from a nearby bowl into his mouth and chewed with his patented 'casually thoughtful' expression. "She was going to help you write your life story, wasn't she? And from what I heard, she was getting pushy about telling you what to write in there, while holding you to an iron-clad contract she had you sign when you were recovering from the trauma of your parents' deaths."

Abigail poured herself a glass of sparkling cider, then put the bottle back in the fridge, just barely holding herself back from slamming the door. "I'm really sorry that Ms. Lounds met such a tragic end."

"You're doing well for yourself, though. Heard you got into the University of Maryland, might even have a shot at a nice scholarship. And you have a new family, new lease on life." Another of those ridiculously transparent shrugs. "How does it make you feel, being taken in like this by Will and Hannibal?"

"It makes me feel like I never need to be afraid of anything, ever again," Abigail announced, raising her dark brows with a triumphant smirk.

Jack was mildly surprised and greatly interested by her vehemence, but she wasn't telling him anything more. She stepped forward and grabbed the small bowl of olives away from him, snapping coldly, "These are for the crudite tray."

With that, she flounced back to the party, her green skirt swaying and the heels of her matching shoes clacking the floor with completely confident superiority.

Jack sighed, rolled his eyes and pressed a hand to his brow. She was going to be damn hard to pin any charges on. She really had the world on a string now. *Like fathers, like daughter.*

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“So *you’re* Hannibal’s psychiatrist,” Alana marvelled, smiling at Dr. Bedelia Du Maurier as the delicate blonde poured them both a glass of rose. “What’s that like, anyway?”

“It used to be rather time-consuming,” Bedelia mused, “But since he became engaged to Will Graham, Hannibal has had much less need of my services. He’s...truly content. To be honest with you, I never expected to see it.”

Alana quirked her head slightly, just a little confused by the way this realization made Dr. Du Maurier seem so relieved, as if she really had stock in Hannibal’s happiness with Will, or thought it distracted Hannibal from some weird ill intention towards Du Maurier herself.

Just my imagination, Alana decided. “I never thought I’d see Will this happy either,” she laughed, and it was true.

Over the course of this sparkling evening, she had resolved to at least give this situation a chance without offering anymore well-meaning but unsolicited advice. Will and Hannibal might feel she was overstepping again, and as long as Will seemed so thrilled and Abigail entirely smiling and at ease, Alana didn’t see any need for her to put her oar in.

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“Hell of a cake,” Jack said to Will as he polished off a dense sliver of dark chocolate cake with tart raspberry filling. He had to admit, Hannibal never failed to impress on the cooking front, and this feast had been no exception. He patted his stomach with a sigh, endeavoring to show Will that same almost-fatherly, yet conveniently detached warmth which had served him so well in initially bringing Will onto his team.

Unfortunately, this method no longer seemed to bring out Will’s honesty. The profiler remained stubbornly aloof no matter how cleverly Jack tried to question him about various facets of his current lifestyle and plans for the future.

“Glad you’re enjoying the food, Jack,” Will remarked coolly, sipping his red wine like the king of this castle. From the way Hannibal kept sneaking adoring smiles over at his fiance, Jack felt this was a fair assessment of the man’s rank in this lavish home which did seem a bit like a castle.

“And the company,” Jack answered, gesturing with his own wine glass to Will’s hand. “Say, where’s your engagement ring? Don’t tell me Hannibal’s the only one sporting some new bling as a result of your big news.”

“Well, he did get me a ring recently, but it’s got this *enormous* emerald on it,” Will revealed, obviously delighted by Hannibal’s excessive habits of spoiling him with pricey gifts. “I told him he’s going to have to get me something that doesn’t weigh my hand down every minute of the day, because I’ll want to wear it everyday, you know?”

“Yes,” Jack said, his face shifting from feigned joviality to something more genuine.

Despite whatever lies they were telling about anything else (and he really *didn't* have a firm theory on that, just a vague but persistent suspicion that something was off), Jack knew that the love between Hannibal and Will was completely real. The joy which seemed to be wafting from Will right now, beaming from his previously miserable demeanor...it touched Jack's heart with poignant memories of the time when he and Bella first got engaged.

"Yes, I do know," he added. "And I'm really happy for you both."

"Thank you, Jack," Will nodded, his own restraint slightly ebbing away as he gave a friendly, appreciative smile to his former mentor. "You know, this is what it's all about."

He gestured around the room. Abigail and Hannibal were regaling the science team with some sort of lively tale of their recent grocery shopping adventures, and the formerly uptight therapist was laughing at his daughter's comments. Alana and Bedelia were conversing with a snobbishly unimpressed looking Frederick Chilton, and the hospital administrator's haughty attitude was its own form of hilarious entertainment.

The room was alive, so much that it made Jack realize he had felt dead inside since hearing the news of Bella's illness. Would he ever have happiness like this in his own life again, or was he doomed to be outside, looking in forever more?

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"It was a wonderful party, Hannibal," Jack said to his host as Hannibal handed him his coat and hat, then showed him to the door with a breezily pleased expression.

"Why, thank you, Jack, it's always a delight to have you at my table."

"You know, you and Will have really made a terrific life for yourselves and Abigail here. It's so neat and tidy," Jack observed, shrugging his coat on and placing his hat atop his head.

"I do pride myself on enjoying the best things life has to offer while making my loved ones just as happy." Hannibal looked at Jack, remaining coyly perceptive. "And cleanliness is next to godliness, of course."

"Of course. One might almost say, though, that your life is just a little *too* neat and tidy." Jack smiled, and Hannibal saw right through it to the suggestion that he and Will might have somehow gotten the FBI supervisor onto the trail of their crimes.

It was just the faintest ghost of a suspicion -- perhaps based on the fast way they had adopted Abigail, his idea that Hannibal had manipulated Will during a vulnerable time, their overall proximity to the Ripper case and Will's sudden, apparent retirement from the field. Just a glimmer of a hint of a suspicion, really, but Jack would never let it go until he had answers.

Hannibal wondered, unworried, more entertained than anything, if Jack would let go of his questioning attitude towards the Lecter-Graham family once Chilton was arrested for the Ripper's crimes. Would he be convinced by the overwhelming evidence that Frederick was to blame, or would he always somehow *know* there was more to his and Will's domestic bliss than met the eye? He supposed he had always known he would have to kill Jack someday,

although it seemed a shame it might be so soon. Hannibal did respect the man, and if he had resented Jack's treatment of Will when the profiler was in his employ, there was surely no more cause for concern on that front, and they could all be friends now. He also truly admired Bella, and sympathized with the couple's plight as a result of her ailment.

All in all, Hannibal came to a conclusion for the immediate future and nodded with a warm, complicated smile in return to Jack's bemused one. "Perhaps. Nothing is ever perfect, but we do take care of our families and hope for the best. We see the best in each other when we can. That goes for friendships as well."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean that you should go home to your wife tonight and tell her you love her," Hannibal elaborated. "Kiss her, hold her near, comfort her through her symptoms and anxieties, placing her needs above all else. Take care of her while you can, Jack."

He had no desire to call upon Jack with murderous intent until Bella was gone and Jack had sufficient time to grieve her. Hannibal considered such action indecorous and insensitive, and would rely on it only as a very last resort. His own love for Will made his heart go out to the sad look in Jack's eyes.

Jack nodded. "Well," he sighed, "I think you're right. That's exactly what I should do. If there's anything I've learned in the past few months, it's that family and love...they're what it's all about. They're what makes everything else worth enduring."

"Goodnight, my friend," Hannibal said, holding open the door.

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"In fairness, *Nightmare 6* is well-known to be the weakest of the series," Will said rather defensively later on as he helped Abigail and Hannibal gather the popcorn bowls to bring back into the kitchen after their movie. "Just like *Halloween 6*, actually."

"I thought *Halloween 3* was the weakest of the franchise because it doesn't have Michael Myers," Abigail replied, refilling her water glass.

"Who?" Hannibal asked, blinking in confusion as he finished rinsing the bowls and stacked them in the sink.

"Oh, you'd *love* him, sweetie," Will enthused. He patted Hannibal's back. "Big knife, lurks around killing people on Halloween night in a scary mask."

"An obvious but not uninteresting modus operandi," Hannibal replied, drying his hands off on a dish towel.

"Yeah, I mean unlike Freddy Krueger! He just never did it for me. We're supposed to be afraid of some idiot in a Christmas sweater just because he can go into people's dreams?" Abigail scoffed.

"Dreams are powerful things, Abigail," said Hannibal.

“Especially when they come true,” Will chuckled, bumping his hip as Abigail groaned.

“You two are insufferably in love, I’m going to bed,” she said, giving into a helpless giggle when her fathers looked at her as if innocently baffled by the way their joy was exhausting to those around them. “Goodnight!”

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“It *is,* isn’t it?” Will sighed happily as he grabbed Hannibal’s hand and tugged him playfully to their bedroom. “A good night.”

“A very good night,” Hannibal smirked, “And it’s not over yet.” He closed the bedroom door behind them and gave Will a thorough eye-screwing.

“But Daddy,” Will laid a hand on his heart, murmuring seductively. “We’ll have to be so quiet.”

“I’m not the one who has a difficult time being quiet,” Hannibal answered as he stalked over to the bed, his eyes locked on Will.

Will started slowly undressing, letting Hannibal watch him undo every button and slide his tie free, stalling to tease him. “We’ll see about that, when I’m done with you.”

“Perhaps we should go engagement ring shopping tomorrow,” Hannibal suggested, undoing Will’s trousers and shoving them down roughly. He put his palm on Will’s chest over his fiance’s thundering heartbeat and pushed him onto the bed, where Will lay with his legs open, looking up at him with devastating bedroom eyes and his teeth sinking beguilingly into his lower lip.

“I want to fuck you while you’re wearing nothing but my ring, darling,” Hannibal whispered, climbing on top of Will and easily pinning his wrists down. Their cocks pressed together impatiently, Will’s bare erection thickening at the tantalizing brush of Hannibal’s hardness beneath his pants.

“I can say from experience, it’s a lovely way to fuck,” Will grinned, never happier than when held down and taken over by his Daddy.

“Naughty boy,” Hannibal said in a throaty voice, reaching to the bedside table to procure the lube, already concocting an endless list of things he wanted to do in order to have Will moaning, naked and weak for him until daylight dawned. Despite his flirtatious manner, there was a deep, aching love in his eyes that made Will smile as tears stung his blue eyes.

“Your naughty boy. You know what my favorite part of this night is, Hannibal?”

“Hmm, do tell me,” Hannibal answered, lazily allowing his body weight to press into Will, just enough to make Will feel so delightfully overpowered, never enough to crush. He nibbled Will’s ear, then began licking and sucking his neck with a happy purr.

“It’s what we’ve built together. How nobody can tear us apart. That I love you, and you love me so much.”

“More than I ever thought I could love,” Hannibal smiled, kissing Will’s lips, then the other side of his neck.

“Me too. And for us,” Will reflected giddily, meeting Hannibal’s sultry gaze as his fiance loomed over him in the rose glow of the lamplight, “Every night is a sleepover.”

Chapter End Notes

The chapter titles were taken from Hayley Kiyoko's album *Expectations,* since the songs "Sleepover" and "Feelings" initially gave me the idea for the story.

I really thought this fic was going to be five chapters when I started it! My goal was just to be ridiculously over-the-top fluffy and romantic, and I hope you enjoyed the indulgent escapism. Thanks to all for reading, kudos and thoughtful comments, I appreciate you so much 💕

Ah! Almost forgot to add, I have at least one little continuation of this storyline coming up for the holidays. So, this is not the final ending ❤️

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!